

**EXPOSITORY PREACHING  
TO SMALL-TOWN CONGREGATIONS  
IN RURBAN AMERICA**

**A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

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**MAY 2007**



## **DEDICATION**

To my wife, Linda...  
You are my devoted friend.

To my family greatly missed...  
Janet and Julia, Jerry, Ethan, Ryan  
You are all safe in God's hands.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Life is a gift and the people in it. I deeply appreciate the people who have helped me turn my vision for this project into reality. They have handed to me the support and understanding needed to have this unique privilege of study. I'm amazed at how my bi-vocational career of pioneer church planting in rural New England has been the perfect venue for research in dissimilar mindsets. My faith has been renewed that people matter to God.

I thank my remarkable wife, Linda, for her patience and sacrifice. She demonstrated great patience over my preoccupation with this project. She has influenced my life with her love for Jesus Christ as well as her love for me. I hope that my desire both to live and to preach God's Word will contribute to her maturing in the faith.

The Leadership Team and members at Christian Life Chapel have been magnificent. They have provided for me the time to research and write, as well as share my vision of how this endeavor might enrich other rural pastors. They have patiently waited on me to further develop my communication skills. I am blessed to serve the Lord alongside good friends.

My life's calling has also been to serve with the burgeoning missionary team of the Rural Home Missionary Association, planting and strengthening churches in small-town North America. Director Ron Klassen and RHMA's Pastor to pastors, Joe Olson, have given me enthusiastic support to keep studying in this field of rural ministry and to share these important lessons with our staff and have interacted with ideas in this thesis.

I deeply appreciate the assistance of Allison Leffingwell who cheerfully went the many extra miles for me by using her editing skills. She demonstrated the heart of a servant through asking me countless questions in trying to understand the ways of the Kingdom and the heart of a preacher.

I thank my parents, Elmer and Rachel Brubaker, for believing in me for all these years and mentoring me through the thick and thin of pastoral ministry. This thesis has its lineage in their faithful and effective service for Christ 'in season and out of season,' and as we have labored together in these past few years through the valley of the shadow of death. God has always shown His face towards us.

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis project is to equip preachers who live and work in the rural American environment and find themselves increasingly challenged in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century by the dramatic turn in a small town congregation's mindset from an agrarian lethargy en route to an urban vivaciousness. Cultures are always changing people and people always change culture. The grand story revealed in the Bible is the unfolding narrative of God's working through culture.

However, no culture is perfect. Every culture is fallen and must find a common residence at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ. Preaching is God's way of changing culture through effective communication to individual mindsets. This thesis provides the evangelical community a definitive work on preaching to two very different mindsets now present in many small town American churches, the rural and the urban. Together they form a new coined word, "rurban."

To accomplish this task, the rurban preacher must become proficient in a minimum of three languages: the Bible, the rural or agrarian mindset, and the urban or cosmopolitan mindset. Together, they often form one congregation. How then does one preach a single sermon and address a primary audience of two? It can be done through the understanding and honor of God's plan for cultural diversity in what is commonly called, the New Testament church.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Small-town congregations are where little things mean more. Francis Schaeffer said, "In God's sight there are no little people and no little places."<sup>1</sup> Only a relatively few small-town congregations exceed 150 or more in weekly attendance. Statistics show that 75 percent of America's churches have an average weekly attendance of 150 or less.<sup>2</sup> A preacher must understand the unique characteristics of such small-town congregations to be an effective communicator in rural America. In the Protestant world, preaching is the primary and most important part of the small-town congregation's worship service. A small-town congregation will thrive or diminish based on the quality of its leadership and the effectiveness of the preacher in exegeting his audience.

#### The Problem

Church ministry in North America can no longer be simply defined as either rural or urban in nature. There is a third classification, "rurban," which

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<sup>1</sup> Ron Klassen and John Koessler, *No Little Places: The Untapped Potential of the Small-Town Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Glenn Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 42.

describes smaller towns that are rural geographically, but urban socially.<sup>3</sup> These areas are created by urban escapees seeking a small-town atmosphere.

Reasons for the rapid growth of these areas are many—an attraction to the small-town lifestyle, easy road access, improving technology allowing for an increased number of home-based jobs, and better schools and neighborhoods in which to raise children.

Rurban dwellers are often more urban than rural in their expectations—less traditional, more contemporary, and highly educated.<sup>4</sup> Many are in white collar careers. They are achievers at work, spending long hours on the job. Their lifestyles leave little time—or room—for God. Rurban dwellers primarily seek satisfaction through family, work, and personal relationships, rather than through a personal relationship with God.

When these cosmopolitan or urban people come to church, they bring their dual culture with them. They expect the rural church to offer the best of both worlds. Rural folksiness is their #1 core value.<sup>5</sup> But professional

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<sup>3</sup> *Rurban* is first used in an article by James Berkley titled, “*What I learned about Rurban Ministry*,” *Leadership* (Winter 1982), 72.

<sup>4</sup> “*Rurban, Is This Word in Your Vocabulary*,” (Morton, IL: Rural Home Missionary Association Pamphlet, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> This author has spent 17 years planting churches in two rurban southern New England communities.

communication techniques, 21<sup>st</sup> Century technology, an up-to-date educational program, contemporary music that may entertain, and a modern facility are problematic expectations that may strain the rural church to a breaking point.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, there is a vast difference between the rural and urban mindsets coexisting within the rural church. This collision of cultures creates a real challenge for preachers. As expositional preachers, they must become cultural interpreters, well-versed in three languages: the Bible, rural traditions, and urban sophistication. As a result, there is a dearth of preachers delivering sermons that reach the hearts of all peoples in their rural, small-town congregations. The rich and the poor, male and female, white collar and blue collar, native culture and new culture—many viewpoints need to be addressed in a single sermon.

Rev. Martin Geise further clarifies the problem:

In the later half of the 20th Century many American churches have become the scene of a collision of rural and urban cultures. People from two distinct cultures inhabit most rural and many urban churches. Socio-cultural misunderstandings hamper the relational and ministry effectiveness of many of our churches.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Klassen and Koessler, 59.

<sup>7</sup> Rev. Martin Geise, *Leading the Rural Church Seminar* (Bemidji, MN: Country Shepherd's Workshop, 1994).

This thesis will address the blend of rural and urban cultures in one congregation—the oral traditions of the rural population as well as the faster technology-oriented focus of the urban population and how to alienate neither. The rurban audience demands a high-quality connection. This thesis will provide the critical understanding needed to connect well with these dual cultures, as well as explain the differences between these cultures.

Knowing these differences will enhance the value of worshipping in a multicultural community if rurban preachers remain open-minded, using audience analysis to create a message that will touch both cultures, rural and urban. They can use this cross-cultural mix as an opportunity to create greater communication and life within the church.

Since the rurban phenomenon is new, rurban specialists are few. The pastor of the rurban church must be a pioneer, willing to work in unplowed ground with few “policy manuals” to consult. Rurban ministry is bi-cultural ministry with all the opportunities for growth and conflict that cross-cultural relationships bring.<sup>8</sup>

The small-town congregation in rurban America provides a kaleidoscope of opportunities and challenges for the preacher seeking to create this high connection between the urban and rural mind sets through a single sermon. Rurban congregations are often naturally imbued with tightly-knit relational issues—both positive and negative. These issues can be part of a healthy

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<sup>8</sup> Klassen and Koessler, 64.

urban church preaching experience. To achieve this end, three key questions will be addressed in Chapter 4 to help the urban preacher understand how to preach to urban congregations:

1. What impact do the common and uncommon characteristics of small-town, urban congregations have on the audience exegesis and delivery of the expository sermon?
2. What are the ways or methods in which expository sermons can best communicate cross-culturally to small-town, urban congregations?
3. How are conflict issues from cultural differences in urban, small-town congregations resolved biblically through expository sermons.

This thesis project is designed to be instructive to anyone engaging a small town preaching ministry. This help will be presented in a series of five seminar sessions entitled, “Effective Expository Preaching to Urban Small-town Congregations.” This seminar clearly defines expository preaching in the urban congregation of small size and answers the key questions above.

### The Evaluative Setting

The very act of preaching, and the sermons presented, must be rooted in the Word of God and the very life of God. Chapter 2 will present the Scriptures as a compass and map for ministry to small-town, urban audiences. A brief study of selected passages from both the Old Testament and the New Testament will demonstrate their significance for preaching in relational ways to

today's culturally diverse communities. Numerous biblical theologies of mission developed for the guidance of foreign mission work can also be reviewed.<sup>9</sup>

Chapter 3 will explore the rural phenomenon. What, exactly is it, and what are its strengths and problems? A narrative overview is presented of the few articles and printed seminars available. Additionally, resources concerning postmodern cultures and multicultural ministry principles in both foreign and urban settings, are included.

Chapter 4 is the syllabus of an extended seminar taught at the annual meeting of the Rural Home Missionary Association in Morton, Illinois. The Seminar is titled: "Effective Expository Preaching to Rural Small Town Congregations." "RHMA" is an evangelical church planting organization whose mission is to plant and strengthen churches in rural America.

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<sup>9</sup> George Peters, *Biblical Theology of Missions* and the more recent reader *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, edited by Winters and Hawthorne, are well worth further study.

### Session 1:

A Rurban Audience Exegesis: The impact of common and uncommon characteristics of small town, rurban mindsets.

*Objective to:* Understand the cultural differences between the rural and urban mindsets.

### Session 2:

Responding to the Rurban Mindset: The ramifications of serving two different mindsets in one small town congregation.

*Objective to:* Discuss appropriate ways to respond to the rural and urban mindsets within the context of one small-town congregation.

### Session 3:

Expository Preaching to Rurban Congregations: The best sermon delivery principles that communicate bi-culturally.

*Objective to:* Explain how expository preaching most effectively communicates truth to a bicultural, rural audience.

### Session 4:

Preaching Resolutions to Rurban Conflict: The “family corporation” becomes a blended church family through the preacher.

*Objective to:* Resolve the common issues of conflict in a rurban congregation.

### Session 5:

Preaching God’s Salvation Story: Seeing the Rurban Culture in light of God’s Narrative!

*Objective to:* Discover how both the rural and urban mindsets can find commonality at the cross of Christ.

Finally, Chapter 5, is a summative evaluation of the “Effective Preaching to Rurban Congregations” seminar. A paper response evaluation was completed by each attendee. Conclusions and feedback were recorded, and this information is reviewed and analyzed to determine the seminar’s perceived relevancy and effectiveness.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

“In the beginning” God created both the heavens and the earth; God created both the sun to rule the day and the stars to rule the night; God created both the roaring seas and the fertile lands; God created both the creatures of the ocean and the birds of the air; and God created humankind in His own image—both male and female. The God whom we worship is a God who loves and values diversity: “And God saw that it was very good.”<sup>10</sup>

Humankind, made in the image of God, receives from God Himself the desire to create, to make something out of Creation. Culture, at its root, is what man and woman have created.<sup>11</sup> Man tills the ground, raises crops, builds a home, develops communities, and learns to live in relationship with others. He builds a culture, “the more or less integrated system of beliefs, feelings and values, and their associated symbols, patterns of behavior and products shared by a group of people.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1:31, NIV.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Pocock and Joseph Henriques, *Cultural Change and Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 84.

<sup>12</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 30.

Cultural creativity is an essential understanding for effective biblical expository preaching—that all people and all cultures proceed from this God-given creative process. Every person, regardless of culture, is related to each of us and to God. Every person, every group, and every family is valuable and deserves our respect and attention, even if there are some aspects of their culture which we do not understand or approve. We must always remember that a common denominator of every culture, even our own, is that it falls far short in God's eyes.

### God's Perfect Model

The Scriptures themselves present a compass and map for bicultural ministry to small town, rural audiences.<sup>13</sup> They combine all the following distinct perspectives that anthropologists have about culture; viewed as a mental or symbolic system for existence, defined as a material system, and, as the ideological expression of social systems.<sup>14</sup> Culture, at best is all about human relationships with other people.

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<sup>13</sup> Multicultural ministry will be understood in the context of this discussion as bicultural, i.e. the rural mindset and the urban mindset.

<sup>14</sup> Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Agents of Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 216.

The Gospel addresses all of these perspectives, their interests and ideas, and interacts with each one. It does so by promoting God's ideas and interests versus the ideas and interests that have shaped the whole of human history.<sup>15</sup> God achieves his interests in the hearts of men through personal relationships with them.

Bryan Chapell states that God designed the Bible to complete us. Its contents indicate that, in some sense, humankind is incomplete. Each culture has within it a lack of wholeness because of the fallen, sinful condition in which we live. War, poverty, STDs, crime, abortion, and many other social ills of our modern day are evidence of this. The corrupted state of each culture cries for God's aid. He responds with His Word, focusing on some facet of our need in every situation. Our hope, explains Chapell, resides in the assurance that all Scripture has a "fallen condition focus."<sup>16</sup>

In spite of the sinful condition, people continued to be intelligent and innovative. They made tools, musical instruments, cities, technological and scientific advances, but they did not use these for the glory of God. Every culture has shown a mixture of wonder and of woe. How could a person or

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<sup>15</sup> Psalm 1,119.

<sup>16</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 40-41.

culture discern the right path in those days, and today? Holy Scriptures go on to explain themselves as the guidance needed, the wisdom of a God given conscience, providing the lamp for the feet, and the correcting everyone requires, regardless of culture.<sup>17</sup> By God's design, the story of redemption seeks to travel through the history of each culture for His purposes and salvation.

This message is repeated through the stories of people who have been touched by the Spirit of God. Adam and Eve, Cain and Able, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Leah and Rachel, Moses, Miriam and Aaron, Naomi and Ruth, Hannah and Samuel, David and the prophets, all have special encounters with God. In spite of their failings, their doubt, and the rebellion of the people who followed them, God continues to reveal his grace and salvation to them. The stories of these people and their relationship with God constitute the Holy Scriptures and the great tradition of Judeo-Christian thought.

The Judeo-Christian worldview is based upon the fundamental realities of Genesis 1-3. A spiritually diverse environment is the foundation of our Christian faith and preaching. In particular, we gain insights about the worldwide (not Western) nature of God, the nature of ourselves, and ultimately, God's purpose for all humankind. He is universal, yet distinct from all creation. The Bible

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<sup>17</sup> Romans 1:18-32; Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

teaches that God is present everywhere, and that, in Christ, He is in all believers.<sup>18</sup> This is God's perfect, multicultural model.

The bicultural setting within a small-town rural congregation makes effective preaching more difficult. Preachers, as well as members of these congregations, are often reluctant to “cross the sea” when they are asked to leave the comfort zone of their own culture to serve another. As a result, there is a dearth of preachers delivering sermons that reach the hearts of all peoples in their rural, small-town congregations. The rich and the poor, male and female, white collar and blue collar, native culture and new culture, rural and urban— conflicting mindsets need to be addressed in a single sermon.

There are two key reasons why preachers fail to make the necessary effort to reach all these different people. First, there is a lack of understanding—we have missed the point of Scriptures. Secondly, there is a lack of motivation.

#### Knowledge: We Have Missed The Point

A rural preacher must first acknowledge the need to minister to others of a different culture. To do that effectively, he or she must first understand the nature of that need—its roots and its solutions. For small-town, rural pastors,

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<sup>18</sup> Colossians 1:27

the Holy Scriptures are indispensable for identifying the needs of the members of their congregations. The preacher must make reference to the Scriptures, because only Scripture addresses real needs, as Pocock and Henriques explain:

I may see a person hungry and, from compassion or logic feed him. From history, sociology, meteorology, or economic theory, I may discover what gives rise to this man's hunger, but I could not address or change his personal human condition of sin, or that of others, that has led him to this point. I could not work for the good of humanity if I did not know its central problem and the solution to it. I need to accept the truths of Scripture as my guide.<sup>19</sup>

The Apostle Paul made a key point in establishing the value of the Word of God as God builds His model for multicultural ministry among us. Paul explains, "All Scripture is God-breathed." He was referring to the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament, the canon of which had been established prior to 100 B.C. Paul continues, saying that these same Scriptures are "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."<sup>20</sup> All of this is in addition to the value of the Word of God for making the reader "wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Pocock and Joseph Henriques, *Cultural Change and Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 80-81.

<sup>20</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

The Apostle Paul lived at a time when Israel and the Mediterranean world experienced an incredible intermingling of nationalities. Paul elaborated on that truth. To the Romans he wrote, "Is God the God of the Jews only? Is He not the God of the Gentiles too? Yes, of the Gentiles too, since there is only one who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith."<sup>22</sup> This had a profound effect on the early church, creating difficulties for preachers like Peter in adjusting to the work of God as the Holy Spirit's movement advanced the Gospel among all the known cultures, not just the Jewish culture.<sup>23</sup>

In God's providence, the time had come to reconcile Jews and Gentiles in the church. It is fitting that Peter, who preached on the day of Pentecost and to the crowd at Solomon's Portico, be the one who opened the door to the uncircumcised. Peter had become increasingly emancipated from the prejudices he was raised with. He had accepted Samaritans as brothers in Christ and equals in the church. In Acts 9 Peter lodges with Simon, a tanner whose trade was despised by the devout Jews. The next day Peter responds to the request of God through Cornelius and travels to Caesarea. There he begins by telling the friends of his host that he should not even be there, since it was profane

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<sup>22</sup> Romans 3:29-30, "For God does not show favoritism." Cp. Romans 2:11 and Ephesians 6:9, NIV.

<sup>23</sup> Acts 10:9-22, 28, 34-36.

(*anathemiton*) for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or even socialize with him.<sup>24</sup>

In a vision God clearly instructed Peter that he must stop making common (defiled) things what God has cleansed.<sup>25</sup> The Greek idiom of “*me*” with the present active imperative *koinou* means precisely this. Peter had just called common (defiled) what God had invited him to slay and eat. But accepting the Gentiles as equals before the Lord was an entirely different matter. “God is no respecter of persons.”<sup>26</sup> This was the “middle wall of partition”<sup>27</sup> between the Jew and the Gentile that Jesus broke down.

Peter now had to complete a very long journey. God had shown Peter that no man (*medena*), not just “things,” should be considered common or unclean.<sup>28</sup> In every nation or culture, the man or woman who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God. Peter had come to understand in his mind that the Gentile would not have to become a Jew in order to become a

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<sup>24</sup> Acts 10:28, “There is no Old Testament regulation that forbids social contact with the Gentiles though the rabbis had added it and had made it binding by social custom.” (Taylor’s Sayings of the Jewish Fathers, pp. 15, 26, 137, 2nd ed.).

<sup>25</sup> Acts 10:15.

<sup>26</sup> Acts 10:34, cp. Deuteronomy 10:17; 2 Chronicles 19:7; Job 34:19, NIV.

<sup>27</sup> Acts 11:3; Galatians 2:12; Ephesians 2:14, NIV.

<sup>28</sup> Acts 10:28.



Christian. This was the same promise that Peter without full understanding preached to all those who were “afar off” on the day of Pentecost.<sup>29</sup> Peter himself did play the coward later in Antioch before emissaries from Jerusalem on this very point of eating with Gentile Christians.<sup>30</sup> He was hindering what God had set out to do. Something he himself had said that he should never do. “So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus, who was I to think that I could oppose God?”<sup>31</sup>

The word of God containing the message of salvation came first to the sons of Israel.<sup>32</sup> All peoples are fallen and are enemies who are at war with God.<sup>33</sup> The sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ ended that hostility and brought peace between man and God by paying the price for sin.<sup>34</sup> Salvation is offered to all because Jesus is Lord of all.

The Apostle Paul linked the authoritative and applicable nature of the Old Testament to the events of the New Testament. The books of the New

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<sup>29</sup> Acts 2:39.

<sup>30</sup> Galatians 2:11.

<sup>31</sup> Acts 11:17 NIV.

<sup>32</sup> Romans 1:16.

<sup>33</sup> Romans 5:10.

<sup>34</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:19 and Colossians 1:20.

Testament are equally authoritative and designed for multicultural preaching.

The writer of Hebrews says that the revelation of Jesus in the Gospels is a product of the same God who spoke to the prophets in the Old Testament.<sup>35</sup> This promise of Jesus Christ was a mystery revealed by the Spirit to the apostles:

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.<sup>36</sup>

It would seem that God has made every possible effort so that the world would get to know Him. He has already spoken through creation, He has written His Word on our hearts, and He has brought witness of Himself through His own people, the church. Yet God commands us to offer reason for our faith to those who ask and even to those who do not ask.<sup>37</sup> Apparently, God wants to make it hard for people of all cultures not to believe, so strong is His desire that no one should perish but that all should come to repentance through our preaching.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Hebrews 1:1-4.

<sup>36</sup> Ephesians 3:1-6, NIV.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Peter 3:15 and Philippians 2:10-11.

<sup>38</sup> Acts 17:30.

However, the rural, small-town congregation has been surrounded both inside and out by people very much unlike themselves. Rural culture can be likened to country homes possessing a small rear deck and a large backyard. Individual cultural settings are designed for privacy, and, even though two or more cultures inhabit the same neighborhoods, work at the same companies, commute in shared cars, or shop at the same stores, they continue to live separate lives from each other. Permission to enter either separate world is by invitation only. Even then, it's done with caution, even by those from dedicated Christian homes. Many would simply prefer to stay within the comfortable confines of their own culture.

The struggles of opposing cultures living together often generates an atmosphere of conflict and distrust. This can create great destruction within the community and provide the rocky soil for years of misunderstandings. However, opportunities for new friendships and an expanded worldview can also be fostered in such an environment. The combined creativity and energy of cultures that respect and serve one another within one congregation can propel any ministry to new heights. But before that evolution can take place, a preacher must be motivated to make it happen.

## Motivation: We Shall Not Be Moved

As preachers, we often blindly hold ourselves in bondage to our own culture and present that conduct as the correct model for everyone. We so easily forget that God's message of salvation is for Jew and Gentile alike, as first announced to Abraham:

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."<sup>39</sup>

God's instruction to Abraham has a similar outcome for people of faith today. His wish is that through our obedience, like Abraham, "all the peoples on earth will be blessed..." It has always been common for obedient saints of God to leave the familiar and travel to the foreign culture. In doing so, cultures are crossed and lives are changed.

Jesus himself commanded, in your obedience to me, begin preaching first in your own culture (Jerusalem), secondly to your neighbor culture (Judea), third to a stranger's culture (Samaria), and last, to our whole world of mixed cultures

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<sup>39</sup> Genesis 12:1-3, NIV.

(uttermost parts).<sup>40</sup> As a result, the Apostles of the New Testament were always preaching cross-culturally.

Unfortunately, the story of Babel often plays itself out in rural, small-town congregations. A typical rural, small church is first formed with great excitement, energy, and vision. As the years pass, however, the church functions less to introduce Jesus Christ to nonbelievers as to provide a safe, secure, and familiar environment to those who already believe and belong. As the congregation ages, the church constructs few, if any, bridges to the community that it is supposed to serve. Instead, the weekly sermons focus on unity, church buildings, and programs.

Even when coming together to live in one city, the residents of Babel deliberately chose to live in monolithic centers within the same city. Civil unrest could be the only result. Here, at Babel, the imputed sin of Adam showed its ugly face and continues to do so today.<sup>41</sup> Human beings naturally refuse to listen to each other as they so often choose to disobey God. God, the heavenly parent, separates His children until they are prepared to listen, hear, and obey. God's judgment on Babel is the fulfillment of what humanity had hoped to prevent—its scattering.

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<sup>40</sup> Acts 1:8, cp. Matthew 28:19-20.

<sup>41</sup> Romans 5:12.

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel —because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.<sup>42</sup>

In the Tower of Babel story, the preacher is often sidetracked by emphasizing God’s wrath, but what is commonly translated as, “that they may not understand each other” might also be rendered as, “that they do not listen to each other.”<sup>43</sup> In confusing the people’s language and scattering them hither and yon, God provided an opportunity for all of His children to bridge cultural gaps and become one people, united in the service of God, though they may live different cultural lives. In Genesis 10, immediately preceding the story of Babel, Moses records the unusual genealogy of the lineage of Japheth, the youngest of Noah’s three sons. “From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, everyone according to their language, according to their families, according to their nations.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Genesis 11:5-7, NIV.

<sup>43</sup> Princeton Abridged BDB, #8085, hearing “to listen,” is the first meaning.

<sup>44</sup> Genesis 10:5, NIV.

In all, 70 people or nations are named, constituting a verbal map of the world. Seen in these two contexts, Babel and the immediate descendants of Noah, multiculturalism is not a curse of divine wrath, but the fulfillment of the obedience to God's commandment – first to Adam and Eve, then to Noah – “go and multiply and fill the earth.”<sup>45</sup> God's children had been out on their own. They grew afraid and tried to come home. He pushed them back out into the world for a very specific and timely purpose.

Multiculturalism is shown in the Holy Scriptures as the perfect situation for effective ministry and evangelism. God has designed multicultural settings as opportunities for local churches to reach the hearts of all peoples. Jesus' words “Those who want to save their life will lose it”<sup>46</sup> have special significance to the urban church today. Every preacher is given the task of sharing the whole counsel of God. Church members must be willing to surrender certain aspects of their culture in order to bring the Gospel to other people in their community. The conviction to do so results from a thorough study of the purposes of God to bring His message of salvation to everyone who would believe in Him.

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<sup>45</sup> Genesis 1:28; 9:1, NIV.

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 16:25, NIV.

## The Purposes of God

God knows the names of all the nations. He knows every one of the 6,165 language groups and cultures they represent today.<sup>47</sup> Each one is a reflection of the purposes of God. Each one has a uniqueness special to Him. Not one culture is ever lost or neglected by God. Instead, God continually seeks to have a personal relationship through Jesus Christ with every culture, every person, every tribe, and every nation. Each culture is but a small part of God's great kaleidoscope which brings Him glory.

In the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit knew and could give understanding to all the 14 languages represented at Pentecost. The Apostle Paul was able to tell his pagan listeners at Mars Hill:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Barbara F. Grimes, ed., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 11th ed. (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1998), 740.

<sup>48</sup> Acts 17:24-28, NIV.



Biblical expository preaching must be free of bondage to any one culture. Culture-bound preaching is a primary reason for the unresolved issues in the bicultural setting of the rural, small-town congregation. However, we can choose to be set free from our culture to serve others. Rural preachers have the God-given permission to walk off that small rear deck and past their large backyards at will. This freedom is precisely the intent of the Apostle Paul's will.

Note Paul's cross-cultural missionary heart:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.<sup>49</sup>

The story of Abraham and Sarah is the first story of walking off the small deck and beyond the large backyard. "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'"<sup>50</sup> The term "to bless" occurs 88 times in the book of Genesis alone, and 400 times in the Old Testament. As Gary Smalley and John Trent point out, the word translated "to bless" literally means

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<sup>49</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, NIV.

<sup>50</sup> Galatians 3:8, NIV.

“to bow the knee.”<sup>51</sup> Blessing is not only bowing the knee, but it can also mean “shining the face.” To bless someone is to look upon him or her with favor, to notice that person, to recognize the person with familiarity. The church in a multicultural world is called to bless the nations by valuing persons and cultures in their particularity, to seek a relationship with them. Therefore, preaching can never be an ethnocentric affair; it must be a family affair, as in “all the families of the earth.”<sup>52</sup>

Abraham and Sarah shared in the struggle to avoid being held in bondage by their own culture. This couple experienced futility and hopelessness because of their inability to bear children. God promises not just a child but also descendants “as numerous as the stars of heaven.”<sup>53</sup> Out of Abraham’s obedience to faith emerged not only a new nation, but also many nations and peoples. Through Abraham and Sarah, all the families of the earth were blessed.

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<sup>51</sup> Gary Smalley and John Trent, *The Blessing* (New York: Pocket Books, 1986), 29.

<sup>52</sup> Genesis 12:3, NIV.

<sup>53</sup> Genesis 12:1-3, NIV.

## Enculturated Churches

The Bible does not use the term culture. But it does use the words “home,” “house,” or “family” in both the Old and New Testaments as words that share in that meaning.<sup>54</sup> The Old Testament primarily uses four words, the first of those being tribe, or *sebet*. The tribe was the most basic organizational structure in Israel in the ancient Middle East. Within Israel there were twelve tribes of Jacob, denoting status, geography, and history.

The second word used is clan, or *mispahah*. It is frequently translated with difficulty, *family*. Though it did denote a family relationship, a clan was composed of groups of families and tended to reflect territorial identity.

The third word used is father’s house, or *betab*. This term reflects the most basic and intimate of social structures, the immediate and extended blood relationships.

The fourth word is significantly related to *betab*; it is *betah*. Like the translation of father’s house, this term speaks of Israel’s covenant relationship with God. They are a people who reside in God’s home.

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<sup>54</sup> Stephen A. Rhodes, *Where Nations Meet* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 109.

In the New Testament, the two words used most often for what we would consider culture are *patria* and *oikos*. *Patria* reflects one's lineage, who is related to whom, physically and spiritually. *Oikos* connotes the intimacy of immediate family and household.<sup>55</sup> Early Christians took over the metaphorical use of family as a picture of the whole church. As Israel was called bet-Yahweh, so the church could be called the *oikos* of God.<sup>56</sup>

Abraham's calling is essential for understanding the nature of the church in a multicultural world, even of one in rural America. Israel was special only because it was given a universal purpose as a nation through God's promise to Abraham. Unlike other nations that could and would live for self-interest and self-preservation, Israel would always be a nation set apart for the blessing of all.<sup>57</sup> The same may be said of the church. Christians are chosen and set apart, not to separate themselves from the world, but that they might engage other cultures, beginning with their own culture in the fulfillment of God's promises. God's first words to Abraham were, "Go from your country."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ephesians 2:19.

<sup>56</sup> C. J. H. Wright, Anchor Bible Dictionary, 2:769.

<sup>57</sup> For further study in God's Mission to the World read Isaiah 42:6-7; Psalm 67:1-2; Daniel 7:14; and Matthew 28:18-19.

<sup>58</sup> Genesis 12:1, NIV.

God has a mission to the whole world. The Holy Spirit is His missionary. In Abraham, a promise was made. In Jesus Christ, a promise was kept. Now all who preach the name of Jesus are God's ministers. It is through us that God desires to bless all the cultures of the earth.

Pastor Stephen Rhodes serves a large urban congregation in Culmore, Virginia. He shared this experience:

The church in a multicultural world witnesses theologically to "living by faith" in its own willingness to follow Abraham's example of leaving home. For many in the church, leaving home is a literal act of leaving one's town or even country and emigrating to another. For others, leaving home is a more metaphorical journey, signifying one's willingness to live faithfully even when everything else seems to change around you. You do not have to actually move to leave home. Many of the long-time members in my congregation have lived here for thirty or forty years. In that time Culmore has changed from a homogeneous, suburban church to an urban, multi-ethnic one. In a very real sense, these long-time members have "left home."<sup>59</sup>

Hearing the call and believing the promise are the first steps toward being part of God's mission to the whole world, even in more isolated, rural congregations. The whole of the book of The Acts of the Apostles is a virtual toolbox for effective multicultural ministry. But there is also a second, more discouraging dynamic which all preachers must face. The Christian life has an essential incompleteness. No matter how steadfastly we reach out to other cultures through our preaching and service to the Lord, the fulfillment of God's

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<sup>59</sup> Stephen A. Rhodes, *Where Nations Meet* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 40.

promises always lies just beyond life's horizons. Abraham and other pioneer preachers and faithful pilgrims "died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them."<sup>60</sup>

### Pioneer Preachers In Small Town Rurban Churches

Cultural transformation is never easy. Throughout the early church in the Book of Acts there were dissensions from both the outside through persecution and inside as the church focused too much on itself-the clashing of cultures. There were initial divisions between the Hellenistic Jews and the Palestinian Jews. Later, there were conflicts between new Jewish believers and Gentile believers who refused to take up Jewish traditions in order to become Christians.

In Acts 6 the Hellenistic Jews were those of the Diaspora. Unlike the native or Palestinian Hebrews, their native language was Greek, not Aramaic or Hebrew. They used the Septuagint instead of the Hebrew Scriptures. While remaining loyal to Judaism, they had absorbed some of the Greek culture that surrounded them. That made them suspect to the Palestinian Jews, especially the Pharisees. "According to the Talmud, Pharisaism made little secret of its contempt for Hellenists...they were frequently categorized by the native-born and

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<sup>60</sup> Hebrews 11:13, NIV.

assumed a more scrupulous populace of Jerusalem as second-class Israelites.”<sup>61</sup> This same racial and cultural hostility carried over into the church.

Many of the Hellenists had been in Jerusalem for Passover and Pentecost. After their conversion some decided to remain under the apostle’s teaching. Others were older people who had returned to Palestine to live out their lives. They were the minority in the church, which helps explain why their needs were overlooked. These needs at first seemed insignificant to the majority of Palestinian Jewish believers.

Hellenist believers complained that their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. Care of widows was traditional in the Jewish society.<sup>62</sup> Paul later defined it as a responsibility of the church.<sup>63</sup> The fact that the Hellenist Jews spoke of their widows collectively indicates they felt the neglect was deliberate.

Recognizing the legitimacy of the Hellenists’ grievance, the apostles summoned the congregation of the disciples to seek a solution. While the

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<sup>61</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981], 329.

<sup>62</sup> Deuteronomy 14:29; 16:11; 24:19-21; 26:12.

<sup>63</sup> 1 Timothy 5:3ff.

apostles recognized the problem, they did not have the time to handle the “widows issue.” To involve themselves in the details of serving meals and handling money matters would take them away from their calling. The apostles commanded the believers to select from their own ranks (Hellenistic Jews), seven men of five required characteristics, who would be put in charge of seeing that the needs of the Hellenistic widows would be met.<sup>64</sup>

Cultural transformation was intimately related to the development of the Christian church and experience. In the solution to the conflict of Acts 6 there was no attempt to assign blame or to act in any paternalistic fashion. The church took very seriously the combination of spiritual and material concerns in carrying out its God-given ministry. The church was willing to adjust its procedures, alter its organizational structure, and develop new posts of responsibility in response to the existing needs. The early church, to be fully biblical, meant they were constantly engaged in adapting traditional methods and structures to meet existing conditions, both for the sake of the welfare of the whole church and for the outreach of the Gospel.

The first church in Jerusalem was also torn by the division between those new Jewish believers who insisted upon perpetuating the Jewish culture and

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<sup>64</sup> Acts 6:2-4.



those Gentile believers who refused to take up Jewish traditions. Jewish church leaders like Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, under the counsel of the Holy Spirit, began to recognize that their tradition was an empty way of life handed down to them by their ancestors. It was Peter who ultimately framed the tension between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in his epistle to believers, “God’s elect,” strangers scattered abroad in a Greek world. Peter’s message is that every true believer is purchased by the precious blood of Christ and given freedom from the “empty way of life” of their ancestors.<sup>65</sup> These new believers, Peter proclaimed, are “living stones” and a “spiritual house.”<sup>66</sup>

These two metaphors capture the essence of what it means to be a pioneer preacher serving in urban churches. The people who made up this great edifice of “flesh and blood” in their natural state had no claim at all to being a people. They came from many backgrounds, from many places with many different languages. Peter says clearly that they were not originally a unified people, but now they had become a people of God.<sup>67</sup>

The metaphor that Peter gives preachers for multicultural leadership is taken directly from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus, in the Gospels,

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<sup>65</sup> 1 Peter 1:18.

<sup>66</sup> 1 Peter 2:4,5.

<sup>67</sup> 1 Peter 2.

pioneered multicultural ministry in a rural setting. He showed us how it is done well.<sup>68</sup> Jesus was a man for all peoples. His life, methods, and ultimate sacrifice are meant to mentor our lives. In turn, Peter calls Jesus the shepherd and guardian of our souls, and he challenges pioneer preachers:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.<sup>69</sup>

Every faithful expository preacher and united bicultural, rural congregation can realize their role in God's plan for spreading the Gospel to every tribe and tongue and nation who sing along with the angels of heaven, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."<sup>70</sup> In choosing to be set free from cultural bondage, the preacher can become a true leader in the richly rewarding experience of building a bicultural church. The Apostle Paul said it best, "I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The events of Luke 4:14 were almost tragic. Cp. Luke 9:51-56.

<sup>69</sup> 1 Peter 5:1-4, NIV.

<sup>70</sup> Revelation 5:9,12, NIV.

<sup>71</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:23, NIV.

What will enable the rurban preacher to move beyond a single cultural distinction into a bicultural ministry? We must begin by respecting the absolute truth that all people are shaped by their culture. Second, we must appreciate and celebrate one another's culture. Third, we must recognize that prejudice will be hindering our urgency and consensus to change. Only with this understanding will we feel secure and free to finally open those rear glass sliding doors. Welcome to the backyard of rurban preaching.

### A Rurban Preacher

Jesus was a 200-percent rurban, small-town preacher from Nazareth.<sup>72</sup> He had the privilege of preaching to crowds of all sizes of both rural and more urban mindsets. The majority of his teaching took place in the countryside. His sermons contained many agricultural illustrations and down-to-earth applications. In sum, he was 100-percent God and 100-percent Jew, a 200-percent person.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Philippians 2:6-7 tells us that Jesus was "in the very nature God." He was 100-percent God. Yet Paul tells us in the same context that Jesus took "the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." He was 100-percent human. Jesus was more than simply 100-percent human, he was 100-percent Jew.

<sup>73</sup> The Samaritan woman in John 4 identified Jesus as such. Jesus obligated himself to ritual washings, Sabbath observances, avoidance of unclean people and places, etc. "King of the Jews" was inscribed by Pilate on a placard over his head on the cross.

Sherwood G. Lingenfelter<sup>74</sup> in an account of his own cross-cultural foreign mission experience, which began in 1967 on the South Pacific island of Yap, relates these words:

The challenge (was) to become what Malcolm McFee (1968) calls a 150 percent person. McFee uses this concept to describe Black Foot Indians who are enculturated into white American society. He argues that they are still 75 percent traditional Black Foot, but that they also learned to adapt to and follow the larger American culture to the point at which some are 75 percent white as well. He calls these people 150 percent persons.<sup>75</sup>

To become a 150-percent urban preacher is more than an ordinary challenge. Discarding some of one's own culture or church identity for the sake of someone else is almost sacrilege to many rural people. We often equate our own way of life with godliness, when, in fact, this way of life has instead become our prison. Let us not forget the example set by Christ who "being in very nature God"<sup>76</sup> did not cling to that identity but instead became not only a Jew, but also a servant among the Jews. This target preaching through specific audience consideration and analysis has then become our paradigm.

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<sup>74</sup> Eugene Nida, Louis Luzebetak, Charles Kraft, Paul Heibert, and Sherwood Lingenfelter have integrated science and Scriptures to enhance multicultural ministry. Modern foreign missions have been drawing on the sciences and their works abroad.

<sup>75</sup> Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Myers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 98.

<sup>76</sup> Philippians 2:6, NIV.

Expositional preachers in small, rural congregations must learn to speak three cultural languages: the Bible, rural, and urban. There can never be a culture-free Gospel. Lingenfelter concluded about his many years of multicultural ministry and preaching:

We are weak people, yet God has made it clear that he loves the weak and uses them to accomplish his purposes. Therefore, the goal of becoming partially incarnate in the culture of those to whom we minister is, by God's grace, within our grasp...150 percent persons accept the value priorities of others. We must learn the definitions and rules of the context in which they live, we must become incarnate in their culture and make them our family and friends.<sup>77</sup>

In essence, we must be willing to leave our own culture, enter the other's, and become full participants within it. We must enter as children, eager to learn how to speak, play, eat, sleep, study, work, and travel alongside the people we serve. In the end, we win the entire community's respect and admiration for becoming 150-percent preachers, fully present to their needs. Our sermons will reflect the challenges of the multicultural context to which they are directed. They will connect the Word and the Spirit of God to the people of God who come to listen from the man or woman of God who has led the way.

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<sup>77</sup> Lingenfelter, 119,122.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### RELATED MATERIAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

Preaching is an intentional act designed for some purpose, whether to provide biblical encouragement to a congregation, to motivate hearers to forgive someone who has wronged them, or to challenge hearers to reevaluate their beliefs. Preaching is purposeful in its attempt to persuade hearers to adopt new attitudes and behaviors.

So what is the relationship between the Bible, preaching, and the congregation? Some preachers presume that their task is merely to proclaim the Gospel, to speak the truth, to herald the good news. Their high view of preaching views their preaching as an activity of God—an act of revelation. Karl Barth agrees, “Preaching is ‘God’s own Word.’ That is to say, through the activity of preaching, God himself speaks.”<sup>78</sup> This understanding must be balanced however with some consideration by the preacher over the uniqueness of each audience. There is some danger in assuming that if people hear the truth, they will eagerly respond appropriately to it. The application of a sermon should seldom be left to the hearer’s own interpretation. The relationship between the Bible, preaching, and the congregation must be strategically developed to

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<sup>78</sup> Karl Barth, *The Preaching of the Gospel*, trans. B. E. Hooke (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 54.

include audience exegesis. Preaching God's Word must be accomplished as effectively as possible.

God's revelation aims at changing people even through the foolishness of preaching, changing their hearts, their minds, and their actions. In reality, most people need to be shown how to act on what they know to be true. By applying the Word to modern life and current trends, preachers persuade hearers to act on the revelation of God because it has been made relevant to their lives. That is the Apostle Paul's premise of the Christian faith.<sup>79</sup>

Since God's revelation seeks to change lives, preachers must present the Bible's message accurately. Expository preaching aims to reflect what the Bible says at its philosophical core, becoming the catalyst for a chain of events in which God first interacts with the preacher, then with the congregation, and, finally, with the community and the world. Dr. Haddon Robinson emphasizes in his definition of expository preaching the need for the preacher to first be shown how to act by the Holy Spirit's guidance, based upon what he or she knows to be true.

Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the

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<sup>79</sup> 2 Timothy 3:10-17.

personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.<sup>80</sup>

This literature review is directed toward the second aspect of Dr. Robinson's focus for expository preaching—the hearers. What needs to be known about a particular audience to successfully communicate the Bible's truth? The references cited in this chapter can help the rural preacher faced with a small-town, cross-cultural congregation discover the answer to this essential question.

### Rural Ministry

The application of expository preaching to a bicultural, rural setting is addressed in *No Little Places: The Untapped Potential of the Small Town Church* by Ron Klassen and John Koessler.<sup>81</sup> This work provides an understanding of rural ministry for the urban pastor suddenly relocated and immersed in a strange, rural culture. Special attention is given to explaining the phenomenon of the rural church and providing examples of small churches whose patrons are making an impact in their burgeoning communities.

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<sup>80</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 14.

<sup>81</sup> Ron Klassen and John Koessler, *No Little Places: The Untapped Potential of the Small Town Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).



Klassen and Koessler define an approach to preaching more suited for a smaller church-interactive preaching. They share many suggestions for the enhancement of object lessons, such as asking questions and inviting open responses during a sermon, encouraging the congregation to ask questions either before or after the service, preparing a testimonial demonstrating how a biblical principle works in real life, using puppets and drama, and calling in members of the church to assist in preparing the message itself.

A second book emphasizes the critical importance of preaching within the small, rural church. *Turnaround Strategies for the Small Church* by Ron Crandall dedicates a chapter to preaching and small group worship. Bicultural or multicultural ministry is not addressed however. Like Klassen and Koessler, Crandall emphasizes “communicating biblical truths through the intimacy of stories and modern parables,” as told by the preacher who moves away from the pulpit, leaving his or her manuscripts behind.<sup>82</sup> The rural church is most often smaller in size, reflecting the size and the values of the community. It is here that everyone lives off of each other’s stories. Material for building parables in the modern day sermon abound daily. Relating these parables through unhindered dialogue, Crandall agrees, creates effective communication.

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<sup>82</sup> Ron Crandall, *Turnaround Strategies for the Small Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 534.

On the opposite end of the theological spectrum, Carl Dudley and Douglas Walrath wrote *Developing Your Small Church's Potential*<sup>83</sup> with rural New England churches in mind. They discuss how social change in rural communities has altered small churches. They believe that small churches are not simply smaller replicas of big churches, and that each has its own unique potential. Dudley and Walrath explore the historical roots of the small church and the impact of population changes on these congregations.

Dudley and Walrath share how social change can be addressed and integrated through personal relationships in order to turn a small church into a leader of social change within the community. The basic resources for change within the small church—and between the church and community—lie in the interrelationship of three elements in the life of a congregation. The more clearly a congregation understands its history and affirms its role in the past, the more easily it can accept the possibility of change in the future. The congregation must also envision what it would like to become. It cannot accomplish what it cannot imagine. Finally, the congregation must believe it has the capacity to achieve the goal to which it aspires.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Carl Dudley and Douglas Walrath, *Developing Your Small Church's Potential* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1988), The authors are on the faculty of Hartford Seminary, CT.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

Dudley and Walrath present preaching as the primary vehicle to promote an otherwise social Gospel. They provide no consideration of the mechanism necessary for making this medium effective. However, one element of this work promotes an inner, life-changing Gospel from within this otherwise extra-biblical mindset. The small church can be an agent of change when it offers a common foundation for the diverse segments of a community who are seeking to make their community a more livable place...The impact of small churches depends on the orientation of the church toward its culture. Many small congregations take their size as one more reason to resist or escape their culture.<sup>85</sup>

The Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools takes a stance similar to that of Dudley and Walrath in *Abundant Harvest*, a collection of essays on rural life and ministry. In an article by James R. Motl, "Preaching to Rural Communities," the smaller country church is told to care primarily for the environment, respond to poverty, and challenge the much-maligned rugged rural individualism.<sup>86</sup> Preaching must concern itself with these most weighty matters, first.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 77, 80.

<sup>86</sup> Victor Klimoski and Lance Barker, editors, *Abundant Harvest* (Essays on Rural Life and Ministry, 2002), 93.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 93.

Within the same collection, in “The Distinctive Context of Ministry,” Reverend Martin Giese explains in great detail the clash of cultures, one rural, the other urban, in a small church. He defines culture as a mindset.<sup>88</sup> The agrarian mindset and existence is contrasted with the urban, citing tension over issues such as independence versus interdependence, autonomy versus submission, managerial styles, and work expectations, as well as survival techniques for the rural pastor

#### Rural or Small-Town Church Ministry

There is a wide spectrum of materials on rural, small-town church ministry in which “rural” is defined in many different ways. The majority of these works are quite dated, written from the 1960’s through the early 1980’s when America was rapidly losing its agrarian society and the urban centers boomed.<sup>89</sup> By the end of the 1980’s, 600,000 family farms had been lost in only ten years.<sup>90</sup> During this period, thousands of small-town churches closed and have long since been forgotten.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>89</sup> A good example is: Harold Longenecker, *Building Town and Country Churches* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973).

<sup>90</sup> Shannon Jung and Mary A. Agria, *Rural Congregational Studies* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).

As a result, in the 1990's there were more rural communities without an evangelical witness than there had been since World War II, notes Doran McCarty in his book *Leading the Small Church*.<sup>91</sup> By the end of the President Reagan era, however, the rural landscape began to change socially and economically. Since the late 1980's there has been a great population shift back to rural areas—not to family farms, but to new suburban centers. Rural areas near cities are being transformed into bedroom communities as developers cash in on the financial opportunities. Small-town churches that survived the loss of the 1970's now are faced with a critical choice—either step aside for the larger church being built down the road or evolve to fit the needs of the growing and changing community.

McCarty defends the church that stays small and viable. His thesis is that the validity of a church is always theological, never economic. “Spiritual efficiency of a particular small church may even surpass that of a nearby “mega-church.”<sup>92</sup> He suggests further that specific theological and leadership concerns are especially important in the role of a small church. The congregation is more than a local community—it is part of the kingdom of God and serves the kingdom of

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<sup>91</sup> Doran McCarty, *Leading the Small Church* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 42.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

God.<sup>93</sup> The small church depends not only on its official ministers but also on its functional ministers—the lay leaders in its membership.<sup>94</sup>

Lyle Schaller expands on that theme in *The Small Church Is Different*.<sup>95</sup> He explains that the small church is different because the primary focus tends to be on the health of the individual rather than on the congregation as a whole. A member's bloodline is most influential in his or her selection as an officer, and the office a volunteer holds shapes that individual. This is true for the rural folk within the rural church and does not reflect the urban folk. In addition, a far shorter time frame for planning is practiced, and the relationship a pastor has with the congregation is valued over his or her academic strengths.

Schaller presents a list of over twenty characteristics to support his conclusion that the small, rural church is different. Again, Schaller addresses only the rural mindset of the rural equation. A few significant characteristics are that the ministry is usually built around the laity, people are valued above performance, and generalists with a wide variety of practical skills are more respected than specialists. He asserts that the grapevine is an asset to the small church because of its relational nature—it has a place for everyone. The small

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>95</sup> Lyle Schaller, *The Small Church is Different* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982).

church is also more responsive to daily changes and seasons, and it follows a calendar that is reflective of its agrarian traditions. Schaller concludes that small churches are not mere miniatures of larger ones, and that all programs and sermons—as well as the administrative structure of the church itself—must reflect its distinctive characteristics.<sup>96</sup>

Glenn Daman's book, *Shepherding the Small Church*, also provides a useful guide to the unique characteristics of the small church in a chapter titled "Understanding the Church."<sup>97</sup> He points out that the small church works through informal channels, and that it works as a whole and relates as a family, functioning and worshipping intergenerationally. Its traditions and heritage are the foundation for its structure and culture. The small church is a place where people favor the agrarian traditions over the cosmopolitan lifestyles.

Daman's large volume is a thorough leadership guide for today's North American churches with a weekly attendance of fewer than 150. This book of practical theology is written from the evangelical perspective, but it only indirectly

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>97</sup> Glenn Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 42-64.

addresses preaching matters. Daman also promotes small church ministry and related topics through a website and MIKROS Newsletters.<sup>98</sup>

Complementary to Daman's work is an insightful seminar<sup>99</sup> by Rev. Giese in which he thoroughly explains the difference between the rural and urban mindsets. He introduces his seminar by stating:

In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century many American churches have become the scene of a "collision" of rural and urban cultures. People from two distinct cultures inhabit most rural, and many urban churches. Socio-cultural misunderstanding hampers the relational harmony and ministry effectiveness of many of our churches. In order to effectively lead churches affected by this collision of cultures church leaders must become "cultural interpreters" knowledgeable in three cultural "languages:" the Bible, rural, and urban.<sup>100</sup>

The rural mindset is defined as "a way of perceiving that arises from a lifestyle and livelihood directly dependent upon the land, and/or the extraction of Natural resources."<sup>101</sup> The urban mindset is "a way of perceiving... that arises from a lifestyle and livelihood not directly dependent upon the land... but rather

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<sup>98</sup> [www.smallchurch.com](http://www.smallchurch.com).

<sup>99</sup> Rev. Martin Geise, *Leading the Rurban Church*, Country Shepherds' Workshop, (Bemidji, MN: Oak Hills Christian College), 1994.

<sup>100</sup> Geise, "Seminar Synopsis," 2.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 4.



dependent upon a specialized and interdependent system of commerce that produces and provides goods, services, and information.”<sup>102</sup>

Preachers face many challenges in their efforts to bridge the gap between the rural and urban members of their congregation. Daman’s characteristics of a small, rural church are the building blocks of effective ministry. Giese demonstrates that in a rural church there may well be an additional set of building blocks that must be integrated into the first—those taking into account differing perceptions and viewpoints.

The Alban Institute, an ecumenical, interfaith organization founded in 1974, is dedicated to providing research-based information and new ways to learn and minister more effectively within and outside an individual faith community. The Institute encourages dialogue among many traditions, including people of diverse ethnicities, men and women, large and small congregations, and those in urban and rural settings.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>103</sup> [www.Alban.org](http://www.Alban.org), “About us”...

The Alban Institute's sociological insights are quite useful in explaining the needs and motivational behaviors of small rural congregations, as well as the uniqueness of small church values.<sup>104</sup> These insights can greatly assist the preacher in sermon application. However, most of their materials are more concerned with leadership and social issues. The following excerpt is typical:

(In the small town church) life experience is understood as a totality. The social world, the flow of rhythms and time, the aspects of one's behavior all cohere in an integrated pattern. This pattern provides a solution to the recurrent issues of life, gives one a sense of all being right in the world, and motivates individuals to maintain it. Behavior is motivated more from habit than intention, and changes, though difficult to achieve, can be very long lived. Reflection is not an ordinary behavior. If an explanation is obtainable, it is usually in the form of a myth, the story of a particular individual's deeds from the past. Problems are solved more on the basis of intuition than analysis. Solutions tend to look like the past...<sup>105</sup>

*Rural Congregational Studies*, by L. Shannon Jung and Mary Agria, was published in 1997.<sup>106</sup> It presents statistics reflecting emerging issues in rural America. A changing rural economy and its consequences, including the decentralized family farm, have had a huge impact on church politics and small church health. We no longer live in a "once upon a time world."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Lawrence W. Farris, *Dynamics of Small Town Ministry* (Bethesda: Alban Institute, 2000), 39 – 46.

<sup>105</sup> Anthony C. Pappas, *Entering the World of the Small Church*, (Alban Institute, 2000), 52.

<sup>106</sup> L. Shannon Jung and Mary A. Agria. *Rural Congregational Studies*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).

<sup>107</sup> L. Shannon Jung, et al., *Rural Ministry: The Shape of the Renewal to Come* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 107.

There is now a “new rural” dimension to the “old rural” values of town and country locations.<sup>108</sup> Diversity, racism, and violence have been added to the issues facing rural America and combine to create a new social fabric. In addition, because of development, the state of the environment in rural America has become a primary concern to all those living there.

However, Jung’s theology of the rural church is based upon a theology of “contextualization”—what the churches can do to “fix” the needs of the world around them.<sup>109</sup> The Holy Scriptures and its principles are not addressed within the context of each community in need. Rather, each community in need must develop its own solutions to life regardless as to whether their decisions are supported by Scripture. This common theme—that each locality must invent its own theology—is shared by most of the cited resources that were written by non-evangelical writers.

### Sermon Application

Rurban audiences in small town America are comprised of busy and distracted people just like every other preacher faces. There have been a

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>109</sup> L. Shannon Jung, et al., “Re-Visioning Rural Ministry: A Theology of Rural Life,” *Rural Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 127.

number of publications that aim to improve the preacher's ability to efficiently and effectively communicate with the congregation.

Jay Adams produced an extensive study on application in the handbook *Truth Applied*.<sup>110</sup> Adam's application is defined and promoted as the other half of exhortation. Preaching is not just heralding, but must also be applicable to everyday life, and this application must be emphasized throughout the sermon. Clear definitions and extensive methodologies are given for applicatory introductions, as well as for format, illustrations, and word choice.

Rurban churches include a wide range of people groups. Not just those who are of the contrasting mindsets of rural and urban. Family worship is still in vogue in most small town churches. The average sermon may need to be expanded to apply to several target groups in one 30 minute period; the young, the old, the married and the single, the rich and the poor. In an article entitled "All Things to All People," which appears in *A Voice in the Wilderness*,<sup>111</sup> Haddon Robinson explains "target-group preaching." He introduces the concept of life-situation grids—the common situations with which all people can identify. Such illustrations are a vital tool for addressing universal and specific concerns of the

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<sup>110</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Truth Applied* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990).

<sup>111</sup> Steve Brown, Haddon Robinson, and William Willimon, *A Voice in the Wilderness* (Portland: Multnomah Press Books, 1993), 71.

congregation. It is within the context of these life-application stories that hearers become participants in the sermon, able to understand the Bible's intended truth.

Another article, "Blending Bible Content and Life Application," expands on this idea. It appears in Haddon Robinson's book, *Making a Difference in Preaching*,<sup>112</sup> and addresses the "so what?" of preaching. The "so what?" of a sermon provides the reason why a person should listen. If Bible content is the message, then life application is the "so what?"—the practical application of the message to life's complex issues. The marriage of the "so what" of preaching with the "target-group" of preaching is the exact prescription for bi-cultural communication within the context of a single congregation through the expository sermon.

Two additional works include extensive chapters on sermon application suitable for any congregation, but exceptionally needed in the urban context. The journey from the preacher's own life experience to the contrasting rural and urban perspectives is long and tedious. Stephen Olford, in a chapter entitled "The Preacher and Application" in *Anointed Expository Preaching*,<sup>113</sup> writes with his usual alliteration that the sermon application must be personal, practical, and

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<sup>112</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 85.

<sup>113</sup> Stephen Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 1998), 251.

purposeful. Bryan Chapell in *Christ-Centered Preaching* demonstrates extensively how to apply the truths of expository sermons with relevance, realism, and authority.<sup>114</sup> “What” and “How” are the two key components of application. Through diagrams and keen insight, Bryan Chapell shows how effective sermon application requires commitment and action, not assent or neutrality.

### Preaching Cross-Culturally

Every growing urban community is in the midst of constant cultural change. Creating a true church, one in which all different members of a congregation feel comfortable with one another, is a challenge. A church that authentically represents what God calls for in the New Testament, one He makes possible through His Spirit,<sup>115</sup> is a community in which people of any background, ethnicity, or station in life experience the regenerating power of God to break down the walls of hostility, overcome personal limitation and sin, and unite in love and respect for one another.

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<sup>114</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 200.

<sup>115</sup> Ephesians 3:6

By remaining open-minded, rural preachers can work to create a message that will touch all cultures, including both rural and urban. This cross-cultural mix can serve as an opportunity for greater communication and life within the church. Klassen and Koessler state in *No Little Places* that::

Since the rural phenomenon is new, rural specialists are few. The pastor of the rural church must be a pioneer, willing to work in unplowed ground with few “policy manuals” to consult. Rural ministry is bicultural ministry with all the opportunities for growth and conflict that cross-cultural relationships bring.<sup>116</sup>

The phenomenon of cross-cultural ministry has been researched and explored in many studies done on the foreign mission fields over the years.<sup>117</sup> A modicum of solid research has also been presented concerning cross-cultural ministry in the large urban North American church.<sup>118</sup> Some of the same dynamics observed in both these contexts, foreign and urban, are applicable to rural, small-town ministry as well.

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<sup>116</sup> Ron Klassen & John Koessler, *No Little Places* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 64.

<sup>117</sup> Three exceptionally good studies are: Walter Brueggemann and George W. Stroup’s book, *Many Voices One God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), and Sherwood Lingenfelter’s contemporary studies, *Agents of Transformation: A Guide for Effective Cross-Cultural Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), also, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

<sup>118</sup> Stephen A. Rhodes took a six month sabbatical from his large urban church in metropolitan Washington DC to travel to twenty churches like his across the United States. The results of his research are published in; *Where Nations Meet, The Church in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1998).

There are a large number of urban multicultural churches flourishing in many major metropolitan areas. Michael Pocock and Joseph Henriques explore more than twelve of them in *Cultural Change and Your Church*.<sup>119</sup> Both Pocock and Henriques are first generation immigrants to the United States and served mission careers in Portugal and Venezuela. After ministry overseas, during which they taught all aspects of international ministry, they now long to see people of every national, ethnic, and cultural background fellowshiping together in America's churches nationwide. Two chapters, "Colliding Cultures" and "A Captivating Model of the Multicultural Church," are of particular interest to the urban preacher. Many urban churches aspire to being a "New Testament" church, both small and diverse. *Cultural Change and Your Church*, carefully applied in these settings, can be most helpful in making that a reality.

There are several other recent publications that support the Apostle Paul's commitment to multicultural ministry: "I will identify with anyone's way of thinking and anyone's way of living in order to communicate my message. I will do anything short of sinning to win men and women to Jesus Christ."<sup>120</sup> *Culture Shift* by David Henderson is an excellent book on biblical communication.<sup>121</sup> This work

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<sup>119</sup> Michael Pocock and Joseph Henriques, *Cultural Change and Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002).

<sup>120</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, NIV.

<sup>121</sup> David W. Henderson, *Culture Shift* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).



reviews crucial changes in both western and world civilizations that may have already shifted our culture out of reach from our present “evangelical” world. Five culture shifts are explored—how we see, hear, think, relate, and believe. Henderson offers ways to better communicate biblical truth given these shifts. This is a practical book designed specifically to assist rural preachers in becoming students of the world within their own rural communities.

The best complement to *Culture Shift*—a “how-to” book—is a “how-it’s-being-done” book. *Preaching to a Shifting Culture* by Haddon Robinson, Bryan Chapell, and Don Sunukjian<sup>122</sup> is a collection of essays from experienced evangelical preachers who rose to meet the new challenges of America’s 21<sup>st</sup> century culture shift. The most contemporary issues for the rural congregation of pluralism and postmodernism are addressed within this context as well.

*Agents of Transformation*<sup>123</sup> and *Ministering Cross-Culturally*<sup>124</sup> by Sherwood Lingenfelter present the “incarnate” Jesus model for personal relationships, putting flesh to His Word through our actions.<sup>125</sup> Lingenfelter

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<sup>122</sup> Haddon Robinson, Bryan Chapell, and Don Sunukjian, et al. *Preaching to a Shifting Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004).

<sup>123</sup> Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Agents of Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

<sup>124</sup> Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Ministering Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

<sup>125</sup> Philippians 2:6-8

writes from his foreign mission experience on the Island of Yap in the South Pacific. He implies that the ministry approach to foreign cultures should be applied to urban America as well—a process of discovery of individual basic cultural values, beginning with a deeper understanding of the rural and urban people served by the church.

Two authors write from their multicultural experiences in urban American settings that reflect a very diverse cosmopolitan church. Pastor Stephen Rhodes wrote a resource book for burgeoning multicultural urban churches. *Where Nations Meet*<sup>126</sup> equally challenges biblical preachers to meet diversity as a friend and not as a foe.

Lyle E. Schaller, in *21 Bridges to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*,<sup>127</sup> enumerates the many changes multiculturalism brought to America in the early 1990's and then makes various predictions of where the multicultural urban church will be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The original purpose of this book was to recruit a higher commitment to Christian ministry and to offer guidance in building bridges to the next millennium. He suggested that, in the near future, many small urban and

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<sup>126</sup> Stephen Rhodes, *Where Nations Meet* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1998).

<sup>127</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, *21 Bridges to the 21st Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

rural congregations would accomplish what they believed they could not. Some would open a Christian day school. Some would relocate and construct new meetinghouses to accommodate newcomers from urban areas. Some would find that bi-vocational pastors were acceptable replacements for expensive full-time resident ministers. Others would discover that members would accept a Saturday evening worship service as a legitimate alternative to a Sunday morning service. This book is already dated. The world has changed even more than Schaller imagined not so long ago. Rurban churches for the most part have adjusted and *exceeded Schaller's vision*.

### Postmodernism

Many people are still searching for a belief system that makes sense to them in modern times. This is even true in rurban America where two very different cultures are pressing for their own identity and faith. Postmodernism and “new age” spirituality propose relying on an individual’s intuition and feelings and giving up the idea of an essential truth. This self-centered thinking affects the way a person perceives the world and his or her place within it. No rurban preacher can assume that regular church listeners subscribe exclusively to a Christian worldview. The rurban expository preacher needs to acknowledge this secular worldview as it shuffles on and off the center stage of human history.

In a liberal theology on preaching entitled *Theology for Preaching Authority, Truth, and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos*,<sup>128</sup> Ronald Allen, Barbara Blaisdell, and Scott Johnston represent dozens of contemporary writers who suggest that postmodernism creates a new and exciting theology for the urban preacher to explore. Because social causes and inner relativism dictate what the church is to believe and practice, this book leaves one feeling that no one can make a sure connection with God at all, only better connections to other people in diverse cultures. An excerpt about biblical truth illustrates what they call a moment of “enlightenment:”

A (new) homiletic of mutual critical correlation also requires the preacher to tell the truth by showing how our awareness of experience cause us to reformulate, or even reject, aspects of truth... While the church must sometimes preach against a text, doctrine, or practice, such elements should be kept in the memory of the Christian community to help the church continually remember its finitude.<sup>129</sup>

In contrast, Graham Johnston states in *Preaching to a Postmodern World*:

To start, know that the Christian outlook is neither wholly modern nor postmodern. So Christianity has not changed—just the issues and questions faced by the people in the pews today. As Helmut Thielicke puts it, “The Gospel must be constantly forwarded to a new address because the recipient is repeatedly changing place of residence.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ronald Allen, Barbara Blaisdell, and Scott Johnston, *Theology for Preaching Authority, Truth and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 67

<sup>130</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001).

Johnston's book suggests how the preacher can change style and approach without compromising substance for the urban audience.

Postmodernism provides many new opportunities in the urban setting. However, there is no need to compromise the truth. A urban preacher must think as a missionary by studying and learning the culture. Then that preacher must improve his or her communication skills to effectively transfer God's truth to individual cultures.

*The Pastor's Guide to Effective Ministry* includes an article by Michael Slaughter on postmodernism that offers the suggestion that the postmodern evangelical church must return to the visual imagery of earlier centuries.<sup>131</sup> He concludes that since most modern people no longer receive the bulk of their information from the printed text we must practice a preliterate culture. Visual arts, tapestries, paintings, drama, videos, and items with visual appeal such as candles should be used to create a connection to the parishioner. Slaughter concludes by saying that electronic media is the new language of postmodern culture.

Three general and widely accepted evangelical books on church growth and change include two by Aubrey Malphurs. These books serve as a steady

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<sup>131</sup> William Willimon, et al., *The Pastor's Guide to Effective Ministry* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2002).

compass into a new century, but neither *Planting Growing Churches*<sup>132</sup> nor *Developing a Vision for Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*<sup>133</sup> addresses the rural or urban church specifically. Most of the insights presented by Malphurs are universal in scope to all churches. A third, closely-related book, *A Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* by Leith Anderson,<sup>134</sup> follows the same perspective and has been of help to many small-town urban churches, in meeting the continuing challenges of a changing urban society.

### Expository Preaching

Dr. Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*<sup>135</sup> is a much-respected textbook in the evangelical world. This book of principles for biblical homiletics builds a convincing case that expository preaching in the urban small town congregation as well as elsewhere, is the culturally diverse event through which God works. *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*<sup>136</sup> is a collection of articles by colleagues of

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<sup>132</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).

<sup>133</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Developing a Vision for Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).

<sup>134</sup> Leith Anderson, *A Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1992).

<sup>135</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching, 2nd ed.*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

<sup>136</sup> Keith Willhite and Scott M. Gibson, et.al., *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).

Dr. Robinson honoring his preaching practice of presenting a single central theme or “big idea” for each sermon. The urban preacher would do well to design his or her sermons around this universal principle of effective communication.

Three additional books supporting urban expository preaching, but not necessarily promoting a “big idea” style, are inspiring in their passion for positive communication and scriptural accuracy. *Preaching with Bold Assurance*<sup>137</sup> by Hershael York and Bert Decker weaves the traditions of solid biblical exposition with secular communication theory. Two books mentioned earlier in this chapter are helpful as well. *Christ-Centered Preaching* by Dr. Chapell<sup>138</sup> is an extensive handbook for preaching exegetically from the Scriptures. *Anointed Expository Preaching* by Dr. Olford<sup>139</sup> is a book specifically dedicated to passionately communicating what the Bible has to say about preaching and the preacher.

The books presented in this chapter all serve to prepare the urban preacher for cross-cultural ministry. By identifying and respecting the unique characteristics of a mixed congregation and then addressing those qualities

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<sup>137</sup> Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 2003).

<sup>138</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994).

<sup>139</sup> Stephen F. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 1998).

within the content of a sermon, the preacher is able to communicate effectively to a bicultural, urban audience. This intimate, interactive approach to preaching is initiated first in the Gospel message, then through the preacher's personal sermon preparation, and, finally, in the overall delivery of the sermon. In the end, however, successful communication can only be judged by its outcome—when a sermon persuades hearers to respond appropriately to the love of God revealed in and through Jesus Christ with their actions.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### SEMINAR: EFFECTIVE EXPOSITORY PREACHING TO RURBAN SMALL-TOWN CONGREGATIONS

#### ***Seminar Description:***

This five-lesson, six hour course explores expository preaching within the context of small-town churches and outlines effective principles of communication in a bicultural or rurban congregation.

#### ***Seminar Rationale:***

Simply being a good expository preacher does not guarantee one's effectiveness when communicating to two or more cultures within a single audience. The small-town rurban church is unique. As a rule, the setting is rural, and the majority of the congregation has strong agrarian ties. However, the growing influx of cosmopolitan people of all ages is rapidly changing the dynamics of both the church life and the audience addressed.

This course examines the challenge of preaching to two very different mindsets within one congregation. The goal of the material is to create an understanding of both the rural and the urban perspectives. Only a full awareness of both cultures can transform the way we preach and help us to find the biblical common ground for all people everywhere, at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ.

#### ***Seminar Objectives:***

1. Understand the cultural differences between the rural and urban mindsets.
2. Discuss appropriate ways to respond to the rural and urban mindsets within the context of one small-town congregation.
3. Explain how expository preaching most effectively communicates truth to a bicultural, rurban audience.
4. Resolve the common issues of conflict in a rurban congregation.
5. Discover how both the rural and urban mindsets can find commonality at the cross of Christ.

**Seminar Outline:**

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**SESSION ONE**

***A Rurban Audience Exegesis: The Impact of Common and Uncommon Characteristics of Small-Town, Rurban Mindsets***

**SESSION TWO**

***Responding to the Rurban Mindset: The Ramifications of Serving Two Different Mindsets in One Small-Town Congregation***

**SESSION THREE**

***Expository Preaching to Rurban Congregations: The Best Sermon-Delivery Principles that Communicate Biculturally***

**SESSION FOUR**

***Preaching Resolutions to Rurban Conflict: The “Family Corporation” Becomes a Blended Church Family through the Preacher***

**SESSION FIVE**

***Preaching God’s Salvation Story: Seeing the Rurban Culture in Light of God’s Narrative***

## SESSION ONE

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### ***A Rurban Audience Exegesis: The Impact of Common and Uncommon Characteristics of Small-Town, Rurban Mindsets*** (60 Minutes)

OVERVIEW: The rurban experience is unique. It is neither urban nor rural, but has elements of both. Preaching effectively there demands that the expository preacher be aware of both the common and uncommon characteristics of the rurban community and the small-town congregation.

**There are three goals.** By the end of this session the class will:

1. Illustrate the significant challenge many rurban, small-town congregations and communities present for expository preachers.
2. Summarize the common characteristics of rural and urban people everywhere.
3. Discover the uncommon characteristics of rural and urban people living in small-town America.

#### **Goal #1**

Illustrate the significant challenge many rurban, small-town congregations and communities present for expository preachers.

- ***Objective #1: Relate my own personal story of a new, rural, small-town congregation unprepared for change.*** (Christian Life Chapel of Colchester, an Evangelical Free Church, was established in rural southeast Connecticut as a new church plant on September 10, 1995 by the Rural Home Missionary Association of Morton, IL.)

1. Natives and older newcomers to the area were overwhelmingly opposed to the new developments in Colchester, Connecticut.
2. The influx of new families represented an unprecedented challenge for small churches such as ours in rural America and New England.
3. Changes like these are God-given opportunities, the right place at the right time.
4. Do you find yourself sitting on the wrong side of the fence when it comes to your own personal family rural and/or urban roots?

**Discussion:**

Have the class compare and contrast their experiences with the testimony just presented in groups of three to five. Then open the floor for discussion.

“A new generation of people is arising that is enraptured with the idea of small-town living. The Gallup Organization recently asked Americans in what kind of place they would like to live. Nineteen percent preferred the city, 22 percent a farm, 24 percent a suburb, and 34 percent a small town.” - Ron Klassen and John Koessler, *No Little Places: The Untapped Potential of the Small-Town Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 59.

- **Objective #2:** *Present this developing rural phenomenon through additional research. Reference: Thesis Chapter One*

Demographically, newcomers to Colchester, Connecticut, tend to be either older adults nearing retirement age (19.7 percent) or younger adults, usually married and with young children (36.5 percent) (U. S. Census, 2000).

“In the early days of our nation’s history, no one could imagine that the urban mindset would become culturally dominant or that the distinctive context of rural ministry would need explanation. In 1820, eighty percent of Americans were farmers so churches operated on the basis of agrarian calendars, clocks, and methodologies. Today, less than two percent of Americans are engaged in farming while ninety-two percent of the people who live in rural areas have a non-farm vocation.” - Rev. Martin Giese, *The Distinctive Context of Rural Ministry* (Klimoski, Abundant Harvest), 45.

- **Objective #3:** Define “rurban” and the rurban preaching experience.

There is a vast difference between the rural and urban mindsets coexisting within a single rural congregation. This collision of cultures creates a real challenge for preachers. Expository preachers must become cultural interpreters, well-versed in three languages: the Bible, rural traditions, and urban sophistication.

- **Objective #4:** Travel together on the journey of applicational discovery for the rurban expository preacher.

### 1. Define “expository preaching.”

“Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.” - Dr. Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), 21.

### 2. All application of Bible concepts to the hearers requires an audience exegesis, not just a biblical exegesis.

Familiarity with the congregation can be the preacher’s greatest blessing—but also his or her most immediate downfall—when serving a small-town church where two congregations exist in one.

#### **Exercise:**

Have class members do an audience exegesis. Write out questions they might ask to analyze their own ministry location and congregation.  
Spouses should work together. Ask for class feedback.

### 3. Ask of the audience: “Where is your faith?”

For the majority of New England churches, the concern for the Gospel stemming from the Biblical world has been abandoned to be replaced by self-serving tolerance, which manifests itself as political correctness.

Morality Lesson #1: Love yourself;  
 Morality Lesson #2: Do unto others as you wish;  
 Morality Lesson #3: Do unto others...Oh, whatever!  
 (Graham Johnston, Preaching to a Postmodern World, p. 9)

### Goal #2

Summarize the common characteristics of rural and urban people everywhere.

- **Objective #1:** *Review with the class the fact that all people everywhere are made in the image of God.*

### Discuss:

Ask the class for five or more God-given characteristics common to all men and women of every culture and time.

- **Objective #2:** *Contrast how the human depravity factor stays the same even though technology changes.*

**1. The culture who does not know God does not love God.**

**2. There is no culture which is always right.**

**3. There is only one God and one true culture—Jesus Christ.**

“So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.” - 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, NIV.

### **Goal #3**

Discover the uncommon characteristics of rural and urban people living in small-town America.

- ***Objective #1: Develop the rurban conflict theme.***

- 1. When a metropolitan area expands, it overruns the open country, villages, and towns of the rural area that surround it.**

Locales in the early stages of that process are termed “exurban.” Those in the middle or later stages are called “suburban.” Together, they form what is now known as “rurban” America.

- 2. Interestingly, these new urbanites then join forces with the locals to resist further suburban development.**

They moved to the location because it was a quiet town, and they will often strive at great personal expense to make sure that it remains a quiet town, even though they themselves helped break the quiet silence of the town by coming there.

- 3. These conflicts are often created by the opposing social contexts.**

These contexts provide the patterns people maintain in their daily lives, including the way they relate to the church and the role the church plays in their lives. Following references from Seminar notes: Reverend Martin Giese, *Country Shepherd's Workshop* (Bemidji, MN: Oak Hills Bible College, 1994).

The Rural Mindset: The agrarian mindset thinks, relates, and makes decisions that arise from a lifestyle and livelihood directly dependent upon the land and/or the extraction of natural (God-created) resources. In the agrarian world there are constant reminders of man's limitations, including his limited ability to control his destiny. They are at the mercy of many factors, such as the weather, beyond their control.

The Urban Mindset: They think, relate, and make decisions which arise from a lifestyle and livelihood which is not directly dependent upon the land, and/or the extraction of natural (God-created) resources. Rather, they are dependent upon a specialized and interdependent system of commerce that produces

and provides goods, services, and information. Most urban people make their living by adding a specialized personal skill to this complex living system.

**Exercise:**

Divide the class into two groups. One group creates a summary of the rural mindset, the other creates a summary of the urban mindset. Then together, brainstorm how the points of conflict create a difficult audience to address.

- **Objective #2:** *Identify and discuss the uncommon characteristics between the rural and urban mindsets.*

CHART A: THE RURAL AND URBAN MINDSETS

RURAL MINDSET	URBAN MINDSET
Limited comfort zones, including few people, but with deeper relationships	Expanded comfort zones, including many people, but with more shallow relationships
Families work independently in tight, personal relationships	Individuals work interdependently in loose, institutional relationships
Life is unpredictable; controlled by the land and the weather	Life has greater predictability; controlled by people and their skills
“Expect the worst,” and dig in to survive	“Anything is possible,” and expect to achieve
Stable, short-term alliances using informal consensus	Volatile, long-term alliances using group consensus
Convictions rule along with preservation	Experimentation rules along with innovation



Goal setting is presumptuous	Goals are essential
Hard work and task-oriented using internal clocks: "Haste makes waste"	Work "smart" and time-oriented using external clocks: "If you snooze you lose"
Informal money management and business by social interaction	Formal money management and business by the book

- **Objective #3:** *Explain how this rural conflict will challenge expository preaching in small-town congregations.*

**1. This is no "Church in the Wildwood."**

However, the larger issues of the community can be scaled down and confronted by individuals who know and care for one another in a godly way. The tempests of the rural community can often best be handled in the small-town church teapot.

**Response:**

Class suggests several examples of Big Issues in their rural community and church.

**2. Preachers who find themselves in the midst of rural and urban differences do well to prepare and present sermons that reflect the fact that neither way of thinking is necessarily wrong.**

Each is a reflection of culture, and culture is often based on assumptions. Most people assume that the way they do things is the right way because they have known only one culture. When cultures collide, people seldom identify it as a cultural collision. Instead they tend to take it personally. The conflict is almost always framed in their minds as a conflict of the right way (my way) versus the wrong way (your way).

**Response:**

Ask participants to offer suggestions about how they would tailor their preaching to address these Big Issues in their rural community and church.

**3. Your message can go a long way toward diffusing these tensions simply by helping each culture understand the other and by helping each value the other's way of thinking.**

**4. Prayer**

**Next Session: How to respond by preaching to the rural mindset**

## SESSION TWO

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***Responding to the Rurban Mindset: The Ramifications of Serving Two  
Different Mindsets in One Small-Town Congregation***  
(90 Minutes)

OVERVIEW: The urban dream to live and serve in a community where the best of both worlds can be achieved is often unrealized. A rurban community over time tends to become more urban than rural. In order to have a God-honoring response to this natural order of things, the expository preacher must reintroduce the biblical theme of God's passion and mission to all people of all cultures.

**There are three goals.** By the end of this session the class will be positioned to:

1. Affirm the dual life patterns that are brought into the rurban church.
2. Commit themselves to a transformative missiological renewal.
3. Present God's vision for the rurban church in preaching.

### **Goal #1**

Affirm the dual life patterns that are brought into the rurban church.

- ***Objective #1: Evaluate the rurban churchgoer's expectations of having "the best of two worlds."***
  1. **Everyone wants traditional rural "folksiness," as well as simplicity and freedom to live as they please.**

2. Rurbia has middle-class affluence. They expect an up-to-date educational program and a preacher who can connect and entertain.
3. They keep separate spaces and places for work, for home, for school, for leisure, and for religion. Some even participate in several different churches.
4. There is insignificant permanent commitment.

They are more likely to participate only in the specific programs that meet their needs or relate to their personal concerns, such as fostering community contacts or joining a playgroup with their child.

**Exercise:**

Take a poll among the class members as to why they chose to live and pastor churches in rurban settings. Find out who in the class has specifically rural or urban roots. Have several share their cross-cultural “shock” experiences inside the rurban church.

- **Objective #2:** Appraise the contemporary rurban congregation experience through discussing the following chart.

CHART B: THE RURBAN CONGREGATION

RURAL MINDSET	URBAN MINDSET
Church seen as a hardy institution that survives disasters	Church seen as a fragile institution vulnerable to stress and erosion
Each individual has a role in the church; emphasis on personal spiritual health	Organization can be more important than the individual; emphasis on church health
See a need and assume responsibility	Identify a task and wait to be asked

People find ways to give tangibly	People pay “dues” mentality
Should be owned by the laity even if dominated by the clergy	Should be dominated and owned by the leadership team
Leadership by bloodlines and/or marriage; office molds the person	Leadership earned by skill or privilege; person molds the office
Short-term planning possible: 3 months	Long-term planning possible: 3 years
People united intergenerationally and work as a whole	People should be divided into age-specific groups and work as parts
Ministry completed by volunteers, generalists who are relationally driven	Ministry completed by paid staff, specialists who are institutionally driven
Worship is a celebration relationally through participation	Worship is a celebration emotionally through orchestration

## Goal #2

Commit to a transformational missiological renewal.

- **Objective #1:** *Illustrate how both cultures, rural and urban, may have lost their sense of vocation a long time ago.*

### Exercise:

Ask every class member to define “vocation” as it relates to his or her life and ministry. Collect these definitions and anonymously read them to the class

**1. Important statistics show a marked decline in spiritual and moral values of most rural communities.**

Reference: Barney Wells, Martin Giese, and Ron Klassen, *Leading Through Change: Shepherding the Town and Country Church in a New Era* (St. Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 2005), 50,51. (information taken from Tim Egan, "Pastoral Poverty: The Seeds of Decline," *The New York Times*, December 8, 2002).

**2. Many small-town churches have failed to adapt to the changing needs of their communities.**

The family, once a mainstay of the rural community, is experiencing the same kind of disintegration that is taking place in urban areas. An alarming number of young people are sexually active and addicted to alcohol and drugs. Yet these same failing churches continue to operate as they did a generation or two ago, having nothing to communicate to a new generation of small-town, rural residents. Sermons address past issues and past challenges.

**3. A transformational mission to others is needed.**

It is common that relationships have a priority in the pastor's vocation, even over a call to preach. In the same way, this "vocation factor" must be built into the spiritual "life way" experience of the rural church.

- **Objective #2:** *Demonstrate how a vocation of mission to others can be targeted within a rural congregation using the Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8 texts.*

The following topics are suggestions more thoroughly presented by Wells, Giese, and Klassen in their book, *Leading Through Change, Shepherding the Town and Country Church in a New Era*, (St. Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 2005), 25-35.

**1. Survival:** Pastors of rural churches who find themselves in a "survival-is-success" congregation need more than anything else to celebrate survival.

**2. Smallness:** Small is not inferior. Fewer people in a church can mean that worship and ministry is far more intimate than one would find in larger congregations.

**3. Unity:** Rural folk view working with others as a last resort. Urban folks view working with others as a way to accomplish a mutually beneficial goal. Working together is the common thread that unites a church in a mission to others.

**4. Goal Setting:** Rural folks hold goals loosely and always privately. They have chores that must get done before something else more significant can be undertaken. Set flexible goals, and keep them informal.

**5. Stewardship:** Rural folks admire the person who shows up and does everything all the time without pay. This stewardship is perceived as more valuable than the perfectionism of someone who could be hired to do the same job. But a great servant is better defined as an individual who works painstakingly to plan and execute an effective ministry.

**6. Encouragement:** Be sympathetic to the rural pessimistic outlook, but never allow this outlook to impede the progress of the church. Work hard to become a good cheerleader to increase the church's optimism for a brighter future for all.

**7. Relationships:** Work yourself into the church web of relationships by pursuing activities with others, even if they do not match your interests or skills. Be willing to take risks—even to make a fool of yourself at times.

**8. Consensus:** Introduce ideas and issues informally over an extended period of time, letting people come to a consensus first, only then bringing the issue to a meeting and a vote. Rural people do not validate formal votes in formal settings. Urban people get upset when their formal votes are complained about, ignored, and even reversed at later meetings. Take the time to patiently and privately discuss your view of needed changes with each decision maker in the church, whether of rural or of urban background.

- ***Objective #3: Identify and destroy “Dragons of Defeat.”***

Reference: Ron Crandall, *Turnaround Strategies for the Small Church*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 61.

**Exercise:**

List in view of everyone the following “dragons”: low-self-esteem, apathy, lack of vision, lack of love for outsiders, limited resources, power-grabbing.

Have each class member choose one of the eight targeted areas listed previously and share with the class how in an imaginary or real-life situation, he/she can avoid a “dragon of defeat.” Have each class member select only one “dragon” and one target area.

**Goal #3**

Present God’s vision for the rural church in preaching.

- **Objective #1:** *Diagram a simple congregational, rural ministry plan to others using 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.*

**Discuss:**

Brainstorm with the class how things were intended to be in a bicultural fellowship, and can be, and will be, by God’s grace.

Ask the text (1 Thessalonians 1:1-8) questions both from the rural and the urban perspectives, i.e., “How did God provide a common ground for this multicultural fellowship?” Help the class make an inductive flowchart of spiritual development as you would in sermon preparation.

- **Objective #2:** *Outline a new sermon titled, “Welcome Everyone—My Town is Your Town” based on 1 Corinthians 9:22 “To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”*



Dr. Haddon Robinson warns of the 1 Corinthians 9:22 text that reaching broader audiences makes a sobering demand on us as preachers: it requires sacrifice. (Steve Brown, Haddon Robinson, and William Willimon. *A Voice in the Wilderness*. (Portland: Multnomah Press Books, 1993), 72

We give up our freedom to use certain kinds of humor, to call minority groups by names that make sense to us, to illustrate only from books and movies we find interesting, to speak only to people with our education and level of commitment. Sometimes such sacrifice feels constricting... Sacrificing what comes most naturally to us, though, is what gives us a platform to speak.

Why go to all this trouble? First because it is right, and then because it is wise. Because the people we are most likely to offend are those on the edge, those cautiously considering the gospel or deeper commitment but who are skittish, easily chased away by one offensive move from pastors. Those already secure in the fold will probably stick by us in spite of our blunders. The new people we're trying to reach are as easily spooked as wild turkeys.

**Assignment:**

Before the next session, ask each pastor in the class to prepare an outline for this sermon title. Let them know that you will use a sampling of these outlines to introduce the next session.

- **Objective #3:** *Pray together for each church represented at this seminar to become a "mission to others" kind of church.*

**Next Session: The best sermon-delivery principles that communicate biculturally**

## SESSION THREE

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### ***Expository Preaching to Rurban Congregations: The Best Sermon-Delivery Principles that Communicate Biculturally*** (90 Minutes)

OVERVIEW: God is also facilitating His agenda as more and more urban people settle into rural areas. The church and community often benefits from the ideas, values, and diligence of new arrivals. These changes are turns of the kaleidoscope of history—more a cause for rejoicing than for rejection. God has set before the rurban preacher an amazing opportunity. There are solid sermon-delivery principles that can help the expository preacher communicate well to the bicultural audience.

**There are three goals.** By the end of this session, the class will be able to:

1. Distinguish between the chosen primary and secondary visible audiences for each preaching opportunity.
2. Engage an imperfect rurban culture with the perfect Word of God.
3. Identify principles of biblical communication that are effective for reaching the bicultural, small-town congregation.

#### **Goal #1**

Distinguish between the chosen primary and secondary visible audiences for each preaching opportunity.

- ***Objective:*** Answer some very basic questions about the audience in advance of preaching every sermon.

Reference: Donald K. Smith, *Creating Understanding*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 119 - 123.

**1. What visible audience will be most aware of the communication?**

**2. Will the real or anticipated response from the secondary visible audience change the preaching style or format?**

**3. What is your own personal “shadowy” image (i.e. attitude) toward the primary audience—positive or hostile?**

- What is their spiritual interest and history?
- Are they in church today to serve—or to be served?
- Are they well-informed about current local, national, and world affairs—or are they consumed with their own problems?
- Is your primary target audience more hostile or friendly?
- What do they know about your sermon subject? Will they be interested in pursuing your theme for the day?

**4. How could each visible audience affect this presentation?**

Clearly, rural and urban mindsets need to be approached differently. The Apostle Paul followed the principle of determining ahead of time who the controlling audience would be: “To the Jews I became a Jew, to win Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law... so as to win those under the law.... To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” - 1 Corinthians 9:20-22, NIV.

**Illustrate:**

To the rural folk I preach motivationally about our move to a larger facility as if they were building a larger home to accommodate a growing family.

**“We are expecting a child again.”**

To the urban folk I preach about the great challenge and adventure and anticipate the positive effects of significant change as they step forward to a larger facility.

**“We are upgrading and expanding.”**

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Consider other scenarios of church ministry and brainstorm with the class how they would respond appropriately and differently with each visible audience. If time allows, have volunteers dramatize several of these events.

## Goal #2

Engage an imperfect rural culture with the perfect Word of God.

- **Objective:** *Discover how to teach parishioners to think rightly in their response to the being, nature, and activity of God in their culture.*

### 1. Preach values that are theological and not cultural.

The measure of theological correctness is ultimately determined by the character of each of the cultures within the rural congregation. In surveying the theology of a rural church, one begins by examining the values that distinguish the congregation. Values are the behaviors and attitudes that people desire to or are expected to manifest. Values are the inward qualities that determine how the congregation acts as a whole and as individuals.

### 2. Preach to the rural and urban cultures as two distinct fallen cultures.

The following chart compares some behaviors within both rural and urban cultures which are not necessarily biblical, and which frequently can be found affecting the thinking, relating, and decision making in rural churches. The Biblical worldview introduces all people to God's culture and celebrates a sacred approach to living within the context of human culture.

CHART C: THE RURAL COMMUNITY AND THE WORD OF GOD

RURAL CULTURE	URBAN CULTURE	BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW
Limited comfort zones, including few people, but with deeper relationships	Expanded comfort zones, including many people, but with shallow relationships	ALL ARE CREATED EQUAL

Families work independently in tight, personal relationships	Individuals work interdependently in loose, institutional relationships	LIFE'S PURPOSE IS TO GLORIFY GOD
Life is unpredictable; controlled by the land and the weather	Life has greater predictability; controlled by people and their skills	THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD
"Expect the worst," and dig in to survive	"Anything is possible," and expect to achieve	GOD'S JOY AND PEACE
Stable, short-term alliances using informal consensus	Volatile, long-term alliances using group consensus	THE WILL OF GOD
Convictions rule along with preservation	Experimentation rules along with innovation	MOTIVATION BY OBEDIENCE TO GOD
Goal setting is presumptuous	Goals are essential	GOALS ARE NOT GOD
Hard work and task-oriented using internal clocks: "Haste makes waste"	Work "smart" and time-oriented using external clocks: "If you snooze you lose"	CHARACTER COUNTS MORE THAN EFFORT
Informal money management and business by social interaction	Formal money management and business by the book	GOD OWNS/CONTROLS EVERYTHING

### Goal #3

Identify principles of biblical communication that are effective for reaching the bicultural, small-town congregation.

## Principles of Biblical Communication to Rurban Congregations in Small-Town America

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### 1. Be clear and credible in the “what” of your preaching.

Small-town America is often a place where people know more about other people than anybody likes. The closer the relationships between people, the greater the social intimacy—and the greater the importance of personal credibility. The authority and integrity of God’s Word must be maintained.

### 2. As much as possible, be inductive by telling stories.

“Lay out the evidence, the examples, the illustrations and postpone the declarations and assertions until the listeners have a chance to weigh the evidence, think through the implications and then come to the conclusion with the preacher at the end of the sermon.” - Ralph and Gregg Lewis, *Learning to Preach like Jesus* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1989), 43.

### 3. Tune into the “secular” of both cultures.

“No one comes to church in a rurban small-town congregation to anxiously wait what happened to the Jebusites in the Book of Judges. Rather, a parent is asking, “What am I going to do with my teenage daughter who is in love with a body-pierced animal?” – Dr. Don Sunukjian

“Talk to the people about themselves—their questions, hurts, fears, and struggles, from the Bible. When we approach the sermon with that philosophy, flint strikes steel. The flint of someone’s problem strikes the steel of the Word of God, and a spark emerges that can set that person on fire for God.” (Bill Hybels, Stuart Briscoe, Haddon Robinson, *Mastering Contemporary Preaching*, (Portland: Multnomah Books, 1989), 65.

#### **4. Use grace-filled conversational dialogue.**

Grace-filled conversational dialogue allows people to get close to you, and they will then sense something of the heart that beats for God. From that closeness, a community will form as people become more willing to be vulnerable and truthful with one another about their victories and their struggles. Reference Acts 8 (Philip and Ethiopian Eunuch).

John R. Stott identifies four characteristics of a true dialogue [*Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1975), 71-74]:

- a. Authenticity. "When we take the time to be with people, a relationship is developed."
- b. Humility. "Distance between people diminishes as we recall that we all have our faults..."
- c. Integrity. "As we listen to our friend's real beliefs and problems, we divest our minds of the false images we may have harbored, and we are determined also to be real."
- d. Sensitivity. "To force a conversation along predetermined lines to reach a predetermined destination is to show that we are grievously lacking in sensitivity both to the actual needs of our friend and to the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

#### **5. Live as an ambassador of peace.**

Every well-designed sermon concludes with a common message, a unified theme, or a single idea that points the entire audience to the heart of God. The urban preacher addresses the mixed audience, projecting the believer's truth that "you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord." - Ephesians 2:19-21, NIV.

**6. Call and arrange for Christian accountability between cultures.**

Expository preaching has purpose. Rurban people need to hear God's message directing them to act in a measurable, practical, tangible way. Biblical preaching must not only set a standard to live up to but a target to hit. This kind of preaching moves people beyond a sense of feeling uncomfortable or guilty to a point of decisive action. Always provide the listener with an answer to the question: "How can I respond in either thought or action to what I've heard?"

**7. Use as much of the new technology as possible. How you communicate God's timeless message will constantly be changing.**

When appropriate, use modern media as tools to reach your target audience. God has set before the rurban preacher amazing possibilities. Educate yourself and put their power to good use.

**Next Session: Preaching resolutions to rurban conflicts**



## SESSION FOUR

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***Preaching Resolutions to Rurban Conflicts: The “Family Corporation”  
Becomes a Blended Church Family through the Preacher***  
(60 Minutes)

OVERVIEW: Believers in the small-town rurban congregation want to know “What is God doing here?” and “How is God active in this time and place?” There are many forces that threaten to unravel the threads of the rurban community and church. The rurban preacher must become intentional about community building to counter the loss of the rural values of place, longevity, and forbearance.

**There are four goals.** By the end of this session the class will be able to:

1. Identify the major pressing issues of rurban America.
2. Create ways to become biblically intentional about community building to counter the loss of rural values.
3. Assist the rurban church through conflict resolution.
4. Find appropriate ways to celebrate after conflicts are removed.

### **Goal #1**

Identify the major pressing issues of rurban America.

- ***Objective:*** Discover the Big Picture issues that confront the rurban community and church today.

**Exercise:**

Informally survey the class as to what the two or three big picture issues are in their rural or urban town. Make a list. Through the raising of hands, identify the four or five most common problems across rural America.

Dr. Shannon Jung, a rural research sociologist, and others, have identified four major issues that they believe must be named and confronted in order to deal with rural America in an honest, community-enhancing way. Dr. Shannon L. Jung, et al. *Rural Ministry: The Shape of the Renewal to Come* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 97ff.

- 1. The changing nature of the rural economy to a decentralized, “family farm” system of agricultural production.**
  
- 2. The population trends leading to the emergence of a “new rural” or urban town, in addition to the “old rural” dying town and country locations.**
  
- 3. The great diversity of cultures, racism, and violent crime in rural America.**
  
- 4. The gradual changes in the rural environment.**

On the surface, these issues are quite secular in nature, and they arise from the underlying fact that rural America has become far less homogeneous. As a result, the misuse of power and influence has escalated. No one listens to the “little guy” anymore. The urban preacher can unintentionally get pegged with this same reputation.

**Goal #2**

Create ways to become biblically intentional about community building to counter the loss of rural values.

- **Objective #1:** *Discuss how a healthy sense of place grounds people and keeps them from feeling adrift and directionless on the tides of mass culture and urban rootlessness.*

**Exercise:**

Ask class members to introduce themselves as others from their original hometown would introduce them. My personal example: "This is Rachel and Elmer's boy from the old homestead along Brubaker Valley Road."

- **Objective #2:** *Discuss how valuing longevity can protect the town from those who would seek to change it without understanding it, but doing so can also prevent the town from accepting new people who do understand it and could help it creatively meet new challenges.*

**Exercise:**

Consider small-town, New England politics. These rural towns are often overseen by a part-time Board of Selectmen. Now a growing number of newcomers are proposing to hire a full-time, high-salaried professional Town Manager. As a community clergy leader, what do you do? Ask for similar illustrations of how the value of longevity is threatened in the rural church.

- **Objective #3:** *Discuss how the odd, the different, and the eccentric can readily find a home in a small town and even find a significant role to play. Yet this forbearance is extended only to individuals by the rural folk, and not to classes or groups of people as with the urbanites.*

**Response:**

Have each class member quickly characterize one of these folks of their rural acquaintance to the person sitting next to them.

**Exercise:**

Divide the class into several separate groups of men and women only. Allow them time to design a plan to build a “Christian” community around one of these rural values: *a sense of place, longevity, or forbearance*. Have a spokesperson relate to the class what their new community building plan will be and why.

**Goal #3**

Assist the rural church through resolution conflict.

- **Objective #1:** *Brainstorm why rural preachers many times may not be able to take their cues on how to resolve conflicts from larger, suburban churches and from what they are taught in seminary or at a popular seminar.*

**Response:**

Briefly ask the class to share their frustrations with conflict resolution programs or models. Sometimes the Matthew 18 process of church discipline may not even be entirely workable in a tiny church. Why?

- **Objective #2:** *Evaluate why conflicts that are addressed solely through the persuasive arguments of good preaching, impressive illustrations, or guest lecturers will most likely remain unresolved.*

**Response:**

Why did the confrontation of John 4:1-38 work for Jesus from a human relationship perspective? How did Jesus “handle” the woman at Jacob’s well to promote a correct outcome for the Samaritans—and also for the disciples?

- ***Objective #3:*** *Get feedback on why the rural preacher must establish loving relationships with his or her people by following the biblical metaphor of being a good shepherd.*

**1. Considerable time is needed, years perhaps, to intentionally become part of the local web of relationships.**

Once the preacher becomes a solid part of the web, however, the rural or urban cultures within that church will have to resolve conflicts where they actually exist. They will not be as willing or able to deflect their problems on to the preacher.

**2. Rural preachers who are pastors understand that they are both teachers and leaders of a “family corporation” in which the development and preservation of biblical relationships is the primary task.**

The Bible affirms the equality of all believers in Christ, but also presents and affirms leadership structure for the body of Christ. In addition, there is a limit to both the size and the diversity of a group that can be managed by consensus. Most all church management models are multi-tiered, even within the small-town rural congregation.

**3. The effective rural pastor will prepare his or her preaching in advance for the numerical growth of the ministry, teaching the principles of Ephesians 4, Romans 12, and 1 Corinthians 12 concerning the diversity and function of spiritual gifts.**

Preaching Mark 10:42-45 on “servant leadership” is always necessary. Affirmation must be given that although we are indeed all one in Christ, God has gifted some among His family for leadership and that, for leaders, leadership is their service to the body.

**4. The effective rural preacher will preach about goals very gently and then, as a good shepherd of the people, give people the opportunity to possess and “own” them.**

“Trial periods” will give people an opportunity to test a goal with minimal risk. “Opinion polls” will give rural constituents a measurement of consensus before committing themselves to a decision, while giving urban constituents information useful in the implementation of the goal.

**5. When the preacher stays with the church long enough to be regarded as a “survivor,” this will bring him or her trust and acceptance as a leader.**

Preacher “survivors” must often check their preacher “status.” They check for the cause of the conflict, and they look for ways to celebrate conflict.

- ***Objective #4:*** Discuss how the rural church could be like a blended family of different people from two different backgrounds (i.e. the premise of “The Brady Bunch”).

**Response:**

Ask for class examples. How do blended families of step-siblings who do not share the same values and traits become successful?  
How can the rural church become a similar step-family, not dominated by one particular individual or family?

**Goal #4**

Find appropriate ways to celebrate after the conflict has been resolved.

- ***Objective #1:*** Study briefly James 1:2-8 as to how adversity builds character within the local church.

**Exercise:**

Ask for testimony of how conflict wondrously created opportunities for two cultures—even two people—to serve one another rather than antagonize one another.

- **Objective #2:** *Challenge the class to look for opportunities for each opposing culture to share one another's burdens, providing for each other's spiritual, emotional, or material needs.*

**Pray together 2X2:**

Everyone is aware of a church conflict somewhere.

Instead of praying for the problem, pray toward a resolution, asking God for opportunities for each opposing culture to share in one another's burdens, providing for each other's spiritual, emotional, or material needs.

**Next Session: Preaching God's Salvation Story**

## SESSION FIVE

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***Preaching God's Salvation Story: Seeing the Rurban Culture  
In Light of God's Narrative  
(60 Minutes)***

OVERVIEW: The Bible narrative of the cross and resurrection of Jesus is the focal point of God's history of man. It must follow that the rurban preacher is called neither to a simple affirmation of any one culture over another, nor to a simple rejection of a particular culture.

Instead, the rurban preacher must cherish each human culture as an arena in which he or she serves under God's daily apportionment of His grace. We are called to remember that we are part of the whole seamless texture of human culture that needs redemption from the original curse of sin under which we all were born.

**There are three goals.** By the end of this session the class will:

1. Retell the story of redemption and see how it exposes the fallen nature of the rurban culture.
2. Establish the fact that redemption by its very nature cries out to always be culturally relevant.
3. Practice the highlighting of God's redemptive narrative in preaching over the diversities of culture.

### **Goal #1**

Retell the story of redemption and see how it exposes the fallen nature of the rurban culture.



- ***Objective #1: Review how God's narrative comes to us in the Bible, spanning many centuries and vast cultural changes.***

From the journeys of Abraham to Israel's oppression in Egypt to the exodus, the wilderness, and the Promised Land, God's Story has already happened in and through cultural changes—and it has only just begun. The days of the judges, kings, prophets, exile in Babylon, and restoration weave the Story through changing scenes that seem to have little in common. The New Testament begins in the days of Caesar Augustus, whose collection of taxes set the stage for the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, and it ends with the apostle John in exile on the isle of Patmos, singing new songs about the victory of the Lamb that was slain. The Story is told in and through many cultural changes but is never limited to or reduced to any one. The way we receive God's Story in the Bible gives a clue as to how it is possible for us to see our own culture in its light. [Roger E. Van Harn, *Preacher Can You Hear Us Listening?*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), p. 84].

- 1. The story of redemption was never limited to or reduced to any one culture.**
- 2. The way we receive God's perfect story of redemption (through culture) in the Bible makes it possible for us to see our own imperfect urban culture in the light of redemption.**
- 3. God's narrative does have a focal point.**

In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all the cultures of the world are exposed to the grace of God. When Jesus Christ was crucified, it was at the hands of two cultures. The religious and political powers joined forces against Jesus and judged him guilty for insurrection, worthy of death on a cross. But God raised Jesus from the dead and unleashed the good news of the forgiveness of sins and the infinite goodness of God. The resurrection of Jesus is God's resounding "yes" to the best of what any culture can promise—even to that very same rebellious and arrogant culture that had just said "no" to God's plan of salvation.

#### 4. The ground at the cross is level—not only for all individuals but for all cultures of the world.

The perspective of the Bible sees the cross of Jesus as the center of history. This perspective prevents the preacher from looking down on other cultures or elevating his or her own as the standard for others. The Bible narrative of the cross shows us that our culture cannot save us. The resurrection of Jesus shows us that our culture is never beyond the reach of God's victorious love. It is possible to see the rural culture in the light of God's narrative because that narrative, at its center, is God's affirmation or rejection of a culture.

- **Objective #2:** *Discuss how our own culture, our shared way of living together, determines how we look at the world—and how we interpret the Bible.*

When we preach a sermon, both our rural and urban cultures are powerfully present. They are present in the language that is spoken, the local stories that are shared through illustrations, the applications that are made to separate mindsets, and the meanings that are inferred. A sermon cannot be spoken or heard from outside the cultures in which we live. How then can we see our rural mixed culture in light of God's story when the sermon we are preaching is embodied in our own personal culture?

#### Goal #2

Establish the fact that redemption by its very nature cries out to always be culturally relevant.

- **Objective #1:** *Propose how redemption resolves the dogma of "political correctness" in America's new spiritual marketplace.*

#### Response:

List with the class other contemporary issues that greatly influence the postmodern culture we live in today. Again review how God's story of redemption seeks to become culturally relevant to each issue.

- ***Objective #2: Celebrate the power of the gospel to unite cultures.***

The apostle's preaching was based on the assumption that God is speaking to all people and that He invites us to join Him in that conversation. This leads us to ask, "What is God saying?" The great evangelist, the Holy Spirit, was their coworker in the joint venture of bringing others to Christ. Because of the Holy Spirit's faithful witness, people know that:

**1. God convinces people of His existence.**

**Romans 1:19-20**

**2. God reveals His own perfect standard of righteousness.**

**Romans 2:12-15**

**3. God convinces people of their accountability to Him.**

**John 16:8-11**

**Exercise:**

Study in three groups, each group taking one of the following texts:  
Acts 10, Acts 15, and Acts 17.

Have the class read the text together and then imagine being there to witness and participate in the events led by the Holy Spirit. Relate to each other in groups what you sense and the joy of the moment as two cultures united.

**Goal #3**

Practice the highlighting of God's narrative in preaching His values over the diversities of culture.

Is it then possible to see the rural church of two or more cultures in light of God's narrative while listening to that story from within one or both cultures? Yes. The record of the story in the culturally diverse Bible, the center of the story in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the progress of the story in overcoming the ancient Jew-Gentile barrier, and the outcome of the story in the culturally rich restored kingdom all affirm this possibility.

When we preach expository sermons that highlight God's narrative over the diversities of culture, we can begin to see our own culture in the light of God's narrative. The comparisons of CHART D demonstrate the Gospel's incredible cross-cultural effectiveness. A full understanding of these cultures transforms the way we preach. Each individual culture and every local church has its own relevancy. We must always seek to find the biblical common ground for all people everywhere, at the foot of the Cross of Jesus Christ.

**Exercise:**

Ask the class to silently read and study the following chart. Then ask the class for additional references for Column C: WORD OF GOD after each mindset is compared.

CHART D: THE RURAL CONGREGATION AND THE WORD OF GOD

RURAL MINDSET	URBAN MINDSET	WORD OF GOD
Church seen as a hardy institution that survives disasters	Church seen as a fragile institution vulnerable to stress and erosion	<i>Believers must have complete dependency on God</i> <i>Psalms 32:6,7</i> <i>1 Thessalonians 5:16-18</i>
Each individual has a role in the church; emphasis on personal spiritual health	The organization can be more important than the individual; emphasis on church health	<i>We are created in the image of God to glorify and serve Him</i> <i>Isaiah 43:7</i> <i>Matthew 22:37-40</i>

Should be owned by the laity even if dominated by the clergy	Should be dominated and owned by the leadership team	<i>Biblical fellowship starts with a personal relationship with Christ Ephesians 2:14-22 Ephesians 5:23, 24</i>
Leadership by bloodlines and/or marriage; office molds the person	Leadership earned by skill or privilege; person molds the office	<i>Foundation of leadership is individual character Titus 1:6-8 1 Timothy 3:1-13</i>
Short-term planning possible: 3 months	Long-term planning possible: 3 years	<i>Prayerfully set goals, establish procedures, make preparations Isaiah 56:7 Philippians 4:6</i>
People find ways to give tangibly	People pay "dues" mentality	<i>Love others through mutual support Romans 12:10-16 Philippians 4:10-19</i>
People united intergenerationally and work as a whole	People should be divided into age-specific groups and work as parts	<i>Members encourage one another in a quest for love and godliness John 13:35 Hebrews 10:24-25</i>
Ministry completed by volunteers, generalists who are relationally driven	Ministry completed by paid staff, specialists who are institutionally driven	<i>Sacrifice oneself completely and entirely for the needs of others John 15:12-13 1 John 3:16 Ephesians 5:2</i>
Worship is a celebration relationally through participation	Worship is a celebration emotionally through orchestration	<i>Worship is measured by loyalty to God exclusively John 4:23, 24 Deuteronomy 6:13-15</i>

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **OUTCOMES**

This D. Min. thesis was motivated out of the conviction that the small-town congregation in rural America provides a kaleidoscope of opportunities and challenges for the preacher seeking to create a connection between the rural and urban mindsets through a single sermon. The focus was on the blend of rural and urban cultures in one congregation—the oral traditions of the rural population as well as the faster, technology-oriented focus of the urban population. The challenge is how to communicate effectively with each without alienating the other.

The Chapter Four seminar lecture-project, “Effective Expository Preaching to Rural Small-Town Congregations,” was designed to instruct fellow preachers of rural congregations how to become cultural interpreters, well-versed in three languages: the Bible, rural traditions, and urban sophistication. The five-session seminar outline is presented in Appendix A of this chapter and has been revised and expanded since its initial presentation.

## Audience Exegesis

The first three sessions of the seminar were presented to a group of 35 American missionary church planters of all adult ages and life ministry tenures and their spouses at the annual conference of the Rural Home Missionary Association in Morton, Illinois.<sup>140</sup> Those attending the seminar represented twenty rural towns across America—all with populations of 15,000 or under. During an in-class survey, eight towns were identified as clearly rurban in nature by the seminar's definition. Seven other towns represented were clearly rural—far more cows in town than people. The remainder of five towns represented were rural, but were in recent years showing signs of strong urban influence, i.e. Wal-Marts being built, etc. This information validated the RHMA mission directors' concern that, after 60+ years of church planting in rural America, the RHMA mission is quickly becoming a mission to rurbia. Therefore this thesis research on rurban preaching was not only welcomed, but appropriate and timely.

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<sup>140</sup> RHMA's Vision Statement: "Planting and Strengthening Small Town Churches in Rural America." For more information and annual conference dates visit: [www.rhma.org](http://www.rhma.org).

## Objective Impressions

The research presented here is a summative evaluation of to what extent this presentation produced the desired understanding. The evaluative context was three one-hour seminars presented to the missionary pastors on the first day of the conference. The style was that of a classroom lecture balanced with the reflective personal experiences of those attending the seminar. Because no formal tests were given and follow-up writing projects were not required, the evaluation was less specific. However, throughout the seminar, and for the conference week that followed, there was interaction with these same fellow missionary pastors and their spouses. This provided a means for evaluating both their response to the lecture as well as the clarity of the communication of the content. Also, each seminar attendee completed and returned a seminar evaluation form (Appendix B).

All of the seminar attendees agreed that they felt the need to become cultural interpreters. One third of the attendees had deep personal roots in urban America but were now serving churches in rural communities—a foreign culture to them. The greatest response seemed to come from the way all three sessions offered a comprehensive approach to practicing audience analysis. In the seminar's introduction, Session One, time was allowed for the seminar participants to do an audience analysis on their own congregation.



The distributed material charting the contrasting characteristics of the rural and urban mindsets both in the community and the local congregation was fairly new to most of the participants. The seminar attendees' approach to cultural differences and the potential impact that would make on preaching was quite random. All of the preachers (church planters) in attendance were either Bible College and/or Seminary trained. Half of the attendees admitted to never having done an audience analysis before. Previously, their sermon preparation consisted of primarily hermeneutical studies and outlining to the fault of the real world cultures that sat before them every Sunday. Their general assumption was that the Holy Spirit makes the primary application of a sermon to a listener's life: "Preach the Word, God does the rest."

The comparison Chart A: THE RURBAN COMMUNITY MINDSETS of Session One and Chart B: THE RURBAN CONGREGATION of Session Two were most informative and beneficial to the class. In later conversations, these fellow preachers pointed out that they gained significant understanding of the rural and urban conflict through studying these charts. In future presentations of this material, it is essential that additional time be allocated to discuss Chart C: THE RURBAN COMMUNITY AND THE WORD OF GOD of Session Three and Chart D: THE RURBAN CONGREGATION AND THE WORD OF GOD of Session Five.

Throughout the delivery of these three seminar sessions, many suggestions were gleaned from the participants regarding key details every preacher must know about the uniqueness of each small-town congregation and community, rural or not. The previous church backgrounds of the members, as well as their levels of spiritual maturity and their knowledge of basic theology, make a difference in how the preacher shapes the sermon. Written and oral comments from the seminar participants highlighted the preacher's need to know about recent hardships and losses in the community and the material well-being of folks during certain times of the year, especially in a more agrarian economy.

The quantitative scores on the attendee's evaluations were quite favorable. The average score on a scale of 1 to 10 was 7.5, indicating that these pastors and their spouses not only grasped the unique nature of rural preaching and ministry, but that they were grasped by it. They appreciated the new perspective provided for understanding the rural audience and the opportunity it presented for enhancing the effectiveness of their oral communication.

### Subjective Impressions

The response to these seminar lectures was positive given the existing framework of many of the participants. Because of their heavily "evangelical" and

“conservative” backgrounds, their approach to sociological issues of cultural differences was guarded at first. Their existing worldview was marked by compartments of “sacred” and “secular.” The framework of these seminar sessions challenged them to engage in self-critique and to use the study of God’s Word and preaching as a means to promote a comprehensive worldview for both believing and for living.

Interestingly, the pastors in the group struggled with the implications of this material far more than did their spouses, many of whom kept nodding their heads and saying, “This makes sense.” The pastors, however, kept trying to steer the discussion around to their presupposition that the Holy Spirit alone does the audience analysis and follows up by making the application of a sermon to a listener’s life. I know these fellow missionaries. Not one of them holds this position theologically. Their struggle was more that the material exposed some presuppositions they were not aware that they were making. A preacher’s natural fear, of course, has more to do with his or her hermeneutical and homiletical performance, rather than with how the audience will respond. Overcoming this fear is a prerequisite to being able to effectively employ the communication model all five of these seminar sessions support.

In rural and urban America, the history of the church, the traditions embraced, and the activities people pursue—whether they call them hobbies or

chores—must be thoroughly examined and understood for the preacher to be able to create an authentic connection to the small-town congregation. We brainstormed about the invisible, intuitive contributing factors that create a receptive audience, such as where people are at on their personal, spiritual pilgrimage with God, as well as the health of the preacher-listener relationship.

We considered that the preacher's perceived attitude of the audience was far more influential on the effectiveness of a sermon than the actual attitude of the listener. This was accomplished by compiling a significant list of definitions of what the preacher's true vocation is. No two responses were alike. However, two general categories of comments resulted. One set of definitions emphasized the preaching and teaching of truth that honors God regardless of the audience's interest in spiritual things. The second set of definitions reflected the fact that the preacher's interpersonal relationships with the audience was of even greater value for effective communication.

Two-thirds of the seminar attendees disagreed with this thesis' initial presupposition that the primary ministry in the church is preaching. The relationship of the preacher to the audience was of more importance to these mostly rural preachers than the proclamation of truth, highlighting again how important relationships are in rural existence. My own thesis research has altered my mind regarding this most important issue. Healthy, godly relationships indeed

are the primary ministry in both the rural and rurban church, and the act of preaching enhances this fundamental God-given privilege.

Rurban living was described by the seminar attendees as exciting, invigorating, and synergistic. They celebrated the uniting of both the rural and urban peoples at the opening days of hunting, fishing, and trapping, as well as the shared experiences of sports, timbering, snowmobiling, riding, hiking, and camping. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the “folksiness” of the rurban community, especially the local hangouts where adults and families congregate, the community festivals and parades, and the multitudinous events of historical significance.

### Evaluation of External Factors

I have learned through the research and presentation of this thesis that in rurban preaching, relationships are still held in high regard, as they are in traditionally rural America. Urbanites look forward to establishing these same significant relationships when moving to the country. However, relational preaching may be new and awkward to them. The rurban preacher must be gentler and less authoritarian. In short time these same new members may not appreciate the “others” in their community simply because too much is now

known of themselves, especially in small-town congregations. Here, there is little place to hide.

I also was reminded during this process of self-discovery in rural preaching that too many times effective preaching was defined by external factors. The attendees of the “Effective Expository Preaching to Rural Small-Town Congregations” seminar reported that their most successful methods of communicating to a bicultural congregation was determined by sermon topic variety, using PowerPoint presentations, having the audience fill in sermon notes in the bulletin, preaching without notes, using large or unusual visual aids, and, most notably, discussing the sermon’s with the congregation following their delivery. I have tried all of these ideas and continue to practice some. However, effective communication to a rural audience cannot be focused on “things to do while someone is speaking” activities. Most all mega-churches operate with these same contemporary methods, and they are no more or less effective in the small-town, rural congregation.

### Inhibiting Factors

There were several inhibiting factors in the presentation of this seminar material. The seminar schedule consisted of three hours, but there was more material than could be covered or discussed in that time period. This meant that

the approach had to be selective at times. The sessions were not elective for the participants, and preparatory information about the content of the seminars was quite limited. Because this setting was designed by the hosting mission to mirror a classroom lecture format, there was far less interaction between participants than I would have liked. When discussion is allowed among participants, they are often better able to articulate their thinking and ministry experiences. It is then that the material being presented tends to be internalized to a greater degree.

### Ancillary Factors

There were several discussions worth repeating that enhanced the learning process. The class enthusiastically responded to each couple initiating their own audience analysis and then reporting many of those observations to the whole group. Together, we developed a list of over 30 targeted questions to ask in the task of audience analysis. The discussion over what is rural “folksiness” was most enlightening to those class members from cosmopolitan roots. The class discovered that this rural phenomenon is universal to all rural areas. However, the instruction concerning Dr. Haddon Robinson’s definition of “expository preaching” yielded the greatest advantage to everyone. There appeared to be for the first time a clear determination from these rural preachers to pursue efficiency not only in the language of the Bible, but also the language of both the rural and urban mindsets.

Several missing elements were transparent that beg for inclusion in this discussion and further presentations. First, the moral decline of the rural landscape has become more injudicious than what researchers have predicted. A discovery of current issues and resources must be presented. Towns of 10,000 – 25,000 have become the most likely places for property crimes, bank robberies, drugs, alcohol and suicide. For example: “In year 2002 there were over 300 times more methamphetamine lab seizures in Iowa than in New York and New Jersey combined.”<sup>141</sup> The towns of this size host most commonly the typical rural church. Expository preaching of necessity must intentionally become proactive rather than typically reactive to the world in which we live.

Secondly, a guide or self-evaluation for preacher “culture” bias should be developed and presented in future presentations of Session Three, Goal #1, third discussion; What is your own personal “shadowy” image (i.e. “attitude”) of the primary audience; positive or hostile?

Third, a practical theology for *koinonia* should be written as a study supplement to Session Four for individual congregations and their leadership teams. I would title it, “Our plan for extending the right hand of fellowship in the rural church?” It would highlight spiritual giftedness, multiple New Testament

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<sup>141</sup> Tim Egan, “Pastoral Poverty: The Seeds of Decline,” The New York Times, December 8, 2002.



“one-another” passages, the examples of multi-cultural attendance around the Lord’s Table, and the serving of an unnumbered population of needy saints-breaking down the cultural boundaries of ethnicity, gender, and religious persuasions. Time should also be allotted to reclaim the four-part cultural impact of our Lord’s Great Commission of every generation of believers in Acts 1:8, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth.

### Conclusion

Effective expository preaching to rural, small-town congregations is responsive to the many internal characteristics of both the audience and the preacher. Effective communication of God’s eternal Truth is more than simply rehearsing biblical data. Since the idea of spirituality is conveyed in the biblical portrayal of the heart, then the challenge of rural preaching is to move the hearts of all members of the bicultural church, so that their lives will demonstrate the reality of God’s heart present in this world. Spirituality is not merely knowledge, but transformation: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV.

The moving of human hearts to action requires both horizontal and vertical components. The horizontal component involves the preacher's role of capturing the imagination of people with the unfolding story of God's grace and the hope it brings to this present life. This involves continually rehearsing the story of God's action in redemptive history. By telling this story in a variety of ways and settings, each appropriate to a culture's understanding and readiness, preachers can help the rural, small-town congregation realize their place in the story.

The vertical component is the work of the Spirit of God to give understanding and ignite the desire to act and live with godly faith. The contextually relevant preaching of God's story, united with the work of the Holy Spirit, has the power to shape the people of God to do God's work in our world today. It is the combination of the retelling of the story and the Spirit that created the disciples' response on the country road to Emmaus: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" This experience remains available to us today as we seek a compelling vision of life governed by the kingdom of God and communicated through the divinely given spiritual gift of preaching.

## **APPENDIX A: CLASS NOTES**

### **SESSION ONE: A Rurban Audience Exegesis The Impact of Common and Uncommon Characteristics of Small-Town, Rurban Mindsets**

A. The Challenge of the Small-Town Rurban Congregation

B. The Common Characteristics of All Peoples Everywhere

C. The Rurban Conflict (Chart A)

The Rural Mindset

The Urban Mindset

D. This Rurban Conflict Will Challenge Every Preacher

1. This is no “Church in the Wildwood.”
2. Preachers must prepare sermons that reflect the fact that neither way of thinking is necessarily wrong.
3. Encourage each culture to value the other’s way of thinking.

CHART A: THE RURAL AND URBAN MINDSETS

<b>RURAL MINDSET</b>	<b>URBAN MINDSET</b>
Limited comfort zones, including few people, but with deeper relationships	Expanded comfort zones, including many people, but with more shallow relationships
Families work independently in tight, personal relationships	Individuals work interdependently in loose, institutional relationships
Life is unpredictable; controlled by the land and the weather	Life has greater predictability; controlled by people and their skills
“Expect the worst,” and dig in to survive	“Anything is possible,” and expect to achieve
Stable, short-term alliances using informal consensus	Volatile, long-term alliances using group consensus
Convictions rule along with preservation	Experimentation rules along with innovation
Goal setting is presumptuous	Goals are essential
Hard work and task-oriented using internal clocks: “Haste makes waste”	Work “smart” and time-oriented using external clocks: “If you snooze you lose”
Informal money management and business by social interaction	Formal money management and business by the book

***SESSION TWO: Responding to the Rurban Mindset  
The Ramifications of Serving Two Different Mindsets in  
One Small-Town Congregation***

A. The Better of Two Worlds Must Be Affirmed in the Rurban Congregation  
(Chart B)

B. A Mission to Others is Needed

C. Formalize Missiological Renewal Targets

1. Survival
2. Smallness
3. Unity
4. Goal Setting
5. Stewardship
6. Encouragement
7. Relationships
8. Consensus

D. Avoid “Dragons of Defeat”

E. Diagram God’s Vision for the Rurban Church in Preaching

1 Thessalonians 1:1-8

F. *“Welcome Everyone: “My Town is Your Town”*

CHART B: THE RURBAN CONGREGATION

<b>RURAL MINDSET</b>	<b>URBAN MINDSET</b>
Church seen as a hardy institution that survives disasters	Church seen as a fragile institution vulnerable to stress and erosion
Each individual has a role in the church; emphasis on personal spiritual health	Organization can be more important than the individual; emphasis on church health
See a need and assume responsibility	Identify a task and wait to be asked
People find ways to give tangibly	People pay “dues” mentality
Should be owned by the laity even if dominated by the clergy	Should be dominated and owned by the leadership team
Leadership by bloodlines and/or marriage; office molds the person	Leadership earned by skill or privilege; person molds the office
Short-term planning possible: 3 months	Long-term planning possible: 3 years
People united intergenerationally and work as a whole	People should be divided into age-specific groups and work as parts
Ministry completed by volunteers, generalists who are relationally driven	Ministry completed by paid staff, specialists who are institutionally driven
Worship is a celebration relationally through participation	Worship is a celebration emotionally through orchestration

***SESSION THREE: Expository Preaching to Rurban Congregations  
The Best Sermon-Delivery Principles that Communicate Biculturally***

**A. Preaching to Primary and Secondary Audiences**

1. What audience will be most aware of the communication?
2. What is each audience like?
3. How could each audience affect the presentation?

**B. Confronting the Theology of Culture**

Preach Theologically

Preach to the Culture

**C. Seven Principles of Making Christ Known Among Intimates**

1. Be clear in the “what” of your preaching.
2. As much as possible, be inductive.
3. Tune into the “secular” of both cultures.
4. Use grace-filled conversational dialogue.
5. Live as an ambassador of peace.
6. Call for Christian accountability between cultures.
7. Use as much of the new technology as possible.

CHART C: THE RURBAN COMMUNITY AND THE WORD OF GOD

<b>RURAL CULTURE</b>	<b>URBAN CULTURE</b>	<b>BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW</b>
Limited comfort zones, including few people, but with deeper relationships	Expanded comfort zones, including many people, but with shallow relationships	ALL ARE CREATED EQUAL
Families work independently in tight, personal relationships	Individuals work interdependently in loose, institutional relationships	LIFE'S PURPOSE IS TO GLORIFY GOD
Life is unpredictable; controlled by the land and the weather	Life has greater predictability; controlled by people and their skills	THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD
"Expect the worst," and dig in to survive	"Anything is possible," and expect to achieve	GOD'S JOY AND PEACE
Stable, short-term alliances using informal consensus	Volatile, long-term alliances using group consensus	THE WILL OF GOD
Convictions rule along with preservation	Experimentation rules along with innovation	MOTIVATION BY OBEDIENCE TO GOD
Goal setting is presumptuous	Goals are essential	GOALS ARE NOT GOD
Hard work and task-oriented using internal clocks: "Haste makes waste"	Work "smart" and time-oriented using external clocks: "If you snooze you lose"	CHARACTER COUNTS MORE THAN EFFORT
Informal money management and business by social interaction	Formal money management and business by the book	GOD OWNS/CONTROLS EVERYTHING



***SESSION FOUR: Preaching Resolutions to Rurban Conflicts  
The “Family Corporation” Becomes a Blended Church Family  
Through the Preacher***

A. The major “BIG PICTURE” pressing issues of rurban America.

1. The decentralized family farm
2. New rural vss old rural
3. Violent crime
4. Environment

B. Positive community building values:

1. Sense of place
2. Longevity
3. The odd, different, and eccentric

C. Resolution conflict through shepherd preaching

1. Time
2. Unity
3. Growth
4. Goals
5. Survivor

D. The new blended family is:

E. Celebrating conflict firm James 1:2-8.

***SESSION FIVE: Preaching God's Salvation Story  
Seeing the Rurban Culture in Light of God's Narrative***

- A. Rurban culture is like all other fallen cultures.
- B. The story of redemption touches all cultures.
- C. God's narrative does have a focal point:
  - 1. Makes ground at the cross is level.
  - 2. Seeks to make each culture relevant.
  - 3. Influences the postmodern culture and all cultures.
- D. Celebrate the power of the gospel to unite cultures.
  - 1. God convinces people of His existence.
  - 2. God reveals His own perfect standard of righteousness.
  - 3. God convinces people of their accountability to Him.

Acts 10

Acts 15

Acts 17
- E. Highlight God's Word over the diversity of culture (Chart D).

CHART D: THE RURBAN CONGREGATION AND THE WORD OF GOD

<b>RURAL MINDSET</b>	<b>URBAN MINDSET</b>	<b>WORD OF GOD</b>
Church seen as a hardy institution that survives disasters	Church seen as a fragile institution vulnerable to stress and erosion	<i>Believers must have complete dependency on God</i> Psalms 32:6,7 1Thessalonians 5:16-18
Each individual has a role in the church; emphasis on personal spiritual health	The organization can be more important than the individual; emphasis on church health	<i>We are created in the image of God to glorify and serve Him</i> Isaiah 43:7 Matthew 22:37-40
Should be owned by the laity even if dominated by the clergy	Should be dominated and owned by the leadership team	<i>Biblical fellowship starts with a personal relationship with Christ</i> Ephesians 2:14-22 Ephesians 5:23, 24
Leadership by bloodlines and/or marriage; office molds the person	Leadership earned by skill or privilege; person molds the office	<i>Foundation of leadership is individual character</i> Titus 1:6-8 1 Timothy 3:1-13
Short-term planning possible: 3 months	Long-term planning possible: 3 years	<i>Prayerfully set goals, establish procedures, make preparations</i> Isaiah 56:7 Philippians 4:6
People find ways to give tangibly	People pay “dues” mentality	<i>Love others through mutual support</i> Romans 12:10-16 Philippians 4:10-19
People united intergenerationally and work as a whole	People should be divided into age-specific groups and work as parts	<i>Members encourage one another in a quest for love and godliness</i> John 13:35 Hebrews 10:24-25
Ministry completed by volunteers, generalists who are relationally driven	Ministry completed by paid staff, specialists who are institutionally driven	<i>Sacrifice oneself completely and entirely for the needs of others</i> John 15:12-13 1 John 3:16 Ephesians 5:2

Worship is a celebration relationally through participation	Worship is a celebration emotionally through orchestration	<i>Worship is measured by loyalty to God exclusively John 4:23, 24 Deuteronomy 6:13-15</i>
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## APPENDIX B: CLASS SURVEY

RHMA Missionary Staff—April 24, 2006

*What is the geographical location of your present church?*

*Town:* \_\_\_\_\_

*State:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Estimated Population:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Review Charts A and B. Do you consider your church and your small-town location "RURBAN"? (Rurban is defined as a single town or congregation that has within it at least two mindsets, rural and urban.)*

*If so, list a few of your own determining observations:*

*If not, of what mindset is your small-town church? RURAL or URBAN*

*What are your key determining factors for choosing rural or urban?*

*On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most effective), how helpful was this discussion in your understanding of the rural and/or urban mindsets? \_\_\_\_\_*

*How accurate is this statement to you: "The **rurban** missionary preacher/teacher must speak three languages: Bible, rural traditions, and urban sophistication?"*

*Not accurate                      Uncertain                      Very accurate*  
*(Circle one answer and explain in a brief comment why.)*

*Do you agree with this statement: "Preaching is the #1 ministry in the small-town congregation?"                      YES                      NO*

*Comments Please:*

Page 2 RHMA Staff Seminar Survey – April 24, 2006

We discussed how the #1 Core Value of Rurban America is “folksiness,” i.e. urban folks wanting the rural atmosphere while maintaining their urban expectations. How do folks in your town exhibit folksiness, if at all?

Please write your own definition of **vocation**, as it applies to your personal missionary calling:

Review **Charts C and D**. Do you agree or disagree with any of the applied uses of the Word of God to the rural and urban mindset comparisons? i.e. Does this chart work for you? Are there any faulty applications in column three of either chart?

Have you ever taken the time to do an audience analysis before today of your own congregation before you preached a particular sermon? Choose one answer.

YES

NO

UNNECESSARY

What are some key characteristics you should know about your audience in order to assure your sermon is relevant to your specific audience and time?

Please list three:

1.

2.

3.

Describe some external factors (e.g. preaching without notes, using PowerPoint, etc.) you are using to improve your public communication effectiveness:

## APPENDIX C

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## VITA

J. Michael Brubaker was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania on August 25, 1954 and lived all his young years on a dairy farm in Lancaster County. His parents had also devoted their lives to pastoral and chaplaincy ministry. He graduated from Warwick High School in Lititz, Pennsylvania in 1972.

After starting a career in professional photography with Sight and Sound Productions, Mr. Brubaker acted upon the call of God from childhood years to enter the Christian ministry. He pursued a Bible College education and graduated from Lancaster Bible College with a Bachelor of Science in Bible in 1978. He later pursued graduate studies at Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Indiana graduating with a Master of Divinity in 1984.

Between graduation and the present, Mr. Brubaker and his wife Linda have been involved in rural church planting ministry in eastern Connecticut serving as a missionary couple with the Rural Home Missionary Association. They have been involved in pioneering two churches. Presently he is the bi-vocational founding pastor at Christian Life Chapel in Colchester, CT. In 2001 he entered the doctoral program preaching track at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Mr. Brubaker will graduate with a Doctor of Ministry Degree on May, 12, 2007.